



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service

Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Medicine Lake: a Dam Novel

BY



Timothy Hugh McRory

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and
Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1992



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-77054-6

Canada

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: Timothy Hugh McRory

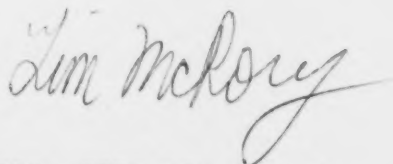
TITLE OF THESIS: Medicine Lake: a Dam Novel

DEGREE: Master of Arts

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1992

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.



#303, 9921-104 Street

Edmonton, Alberta

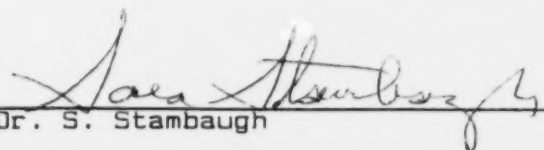
T5K 2K3

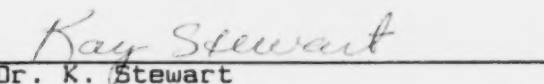
July 9, 1992

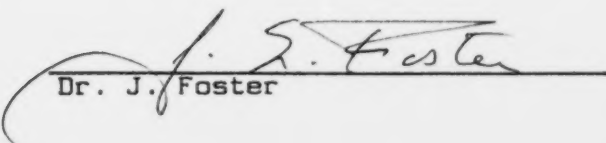
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT THEY HAVE READ, AND
RECOMMEND TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
FOR ACCEPTANCE, A THESIS
ENTITLED Medicine Lake: a Dam Novel
SUBMITTED BY Timothy Hugh McRory
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF Master of Arts


Dr. S. Stambaugh


Dr. K. Stewart


Dr. J. Foster

Dedication

This work is dedicated to Susan, who, for some reason, loves me. It is also dedicated to the memory of Edward Spenser Scragg.

ABSTRACT

Peter Slater comes to Jasper in September of 1954 to take up a job as reporter on the local newspaper. He finds himself falling in love with the town's first female doctor, but in conflict with her over the development of Medicine Lake. The damming of the lake is the major story which Slater has to cover, as the pro- and anti-dam forces within the town clash. An eastern Canadian engineer, Stanislaus Mickliewiecz, has been hired to dam the lake because its low water levels have been creating difficulties for the local tourist trade. Mickliewiecz regards the project as a fait accompli, and local knowledge as unnecessary to its successful completion. Willie Manybears, a native trail guide, tells him that native legend places powerful spirits under the lake, but Mickliewiecz, who prides himself on believing only in technology, pays no attention. He makes three attempts to dam the lake, and all three fail, for no discernible reason. Finally, driven to distraction by his failures, Mickliewiecz decides the only solution is to destroy the lake. Instead, he destroys himself. Unconquerable technology has failed, apparently through the opposition of mysterious forces.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Prof. Sara Stambaugh, who allowed me to realize a dream, who always supported before she criticized, and whose criticism was always valuable. Thanks must also go to Prof. Kay Stewart for her interest, her advice, and her positive attitude, Prof. R.J.S. Grant for his encouragement and friendship, and to all the non-academic staff of the English department for their cheerful assistance.

Table of Contents

Prologue	1
1.	6
2.	18
3.	31
4.	49
5.	67
6.	80
7.	92
8.	110
9.	126
10.	136
11.	147
12.	160
13.	168
14.	176
15.	186
16.	189
17.	194
18.	204
19.	213
20.	221
21.	227
Epilogue	238

Prologue

Truth is, after Stan dropped the dynamite, there really wasn't enough of him to bury properly. All they ever found was his left boot, laces undone, looking no worse for wear. The rest had been vaporized, driven so hard into the rocks you couldn't tell where Stan ended and the Rockies began, which made it a little tough to get him into a coffin. The boot fit just fine. But that still left the casket about a hundred and eighty pounds light, and even the rye-laced coffee Romeo Slipchuk was distributing to the ad hoc burial committee in the back of the Jasper Funeral Parlour wasn't going to alter that fact. People from Toronto would notice something was wrong if the casket only required one pallbearer instead of six. Since Stan was to be buried in Toronto, everyone agreed this could be something of a problem.

Delta Mackenzie suggested putting in someone else's body.

"It's going to be a closed casket, right? Nobody will know the difference! That's what we learned in med school," she giggled. "One dead body is just like the next. Food for wooooorms!"

Delta normally did not drink - and Romeo was a generous hand with the rye bottle.

Judge Pennifold looked offended. "Doctor Mackenzie!"

He was the only one who ever ever addressed her formally.
"I'm appalled you could even make such a suggestion.
Switching one body for another would be an offense both
against humanity and the laws of Canada. It would be
morally reprehensible!"

Delta's giggle dissolved into a flood of tears. Peter Slater seized the opportunity to put his arm comfortingly around the good doctor. She didn't stop crying, but it certainly made him feel better.

The judge thoughtfully passed his handkerchief over to Delta before continuing. "Besides, we don't have another body available at the moment. Do we?" He cocked an inquiring eyebrow at Romeo, who shook his head sadly. "Oh. Probably just as well. It'd be illegal, you know. I'm a judge - don't get to be a judge without knowing lots of stuff - and I know these things. My word on it." He judicially expropriated the rye bottle from Romeo's grip.

Naturally, Willie Manybears came up with the solution.

"Fill the coffin with rocks," he said.

"Rocks?" Romeo looked upset.

Willie shrugged and stared into his coffee cup.

"Why not? Who's going to look? We've got to put something in it. Those rocks up there hold all that's left of him."

The undertaker was not happy. "Rocks!" he muttered, shaking his head.

"Why not? Bones of the earth. I like it!" said the judge. He gestured with the rye bottle. "More coffee, anyone?"

"So what do you usually use when there's no body?" Delta asked Romeo, curiosity getting the better of her tears. Although she had stopped crying, Peter's comforting arm remained around her waist, and she seemed to find it necessary to lean heavily against him for support. He bore up manfully under the burden.

Romeo hated giving up trade secrets. "Undertaking," he often said, "is a jungle." With all of them staring at him, he had to answer.

"We use sandbags," he said with reluctance. "We jam them in at the head and the foot of the coffin, and they don't slide around. Nobody can tell the difference." He turned to Slater. "We have to do something when they bring in a body that the bears have been at, or the relatives get real upset. Please don't write that in the paper."

Peter was busy smelling Delta's hair, but one word caught his attention. He looked at Willie.

"Sandbags!" they said together. A giggle trickled out of Peter, and Willie's face contorted painfully as he fought to wipe the grin off his face. Peter managed to get himself back under control and adopted the suitably repentant look expected of one under such tragic circumstances. That lasted about a tenth of a second after

Willie, looking determinedly at a dusty ceiling fixture, uttered the magic words.

"And used mattresses?"

A second giggle escaped Peter.

"And old magazines!" he blurted as the dam broke and his laughter spurted out in torrents, a flood which swept away all the restraints, and he clutched his sides and slid off his chair, howling with laughter while Willie did the same. After a brief, confused moment, the other three joined in.

When the last trickles of mirth died away, Peter was sitting on the floor next to Delta. They held hands and agreed with the rest that Stan's coffin would be sent back east sealed, holding some rocks from the mountain wrapped in pieces of old mattress, with magazines stuffed in around them to make sure they didn't move, and a couple of sandbags to make up the weight. And some lake water. Willie insisted on that.

"Just a few drops over everything before we seal him up. It's the way he'd want it," he said. He shrugged. "It's just a feeling. Some of the old stories -- well, you never know, do you?"

Peter remembered Willie's tale of the powerful spirits who drink the waters of Medicine Lake, and recalled the muffled thunder of the waters. He shivered and nodded his agreement.

Romeo, however, was indignant at the suggestion.

"Water, in one of my coffins? Because of some old legend? It's too much. First, you want to load it up with rocks and sandbags and trash, and now you want to pour water in it. No. Absolutely NO! I can't let you do it. You people are heretics! What about respect for the dead? What about his immortal soul?"

Delta explained it.

"That's what Willie was talking about, Romeo."

And that's how the decision was reached on the best way to bury Stan Mickliewicz's boot, God rest his soul.

Apparently, no one down east noticed the deception, for Jasper never heard another word about the matter, apart from a single letter from the medical investigator's office in Edmonton requesting a death certificate for their files. Delta, as attending physician, filled out the form and didn't even hesitate when she came to the line inquiring how the deceased had met his end.

"Natural causes," she wrote. "Heart failure."

Chapter One

"JASPER - a JEWEL set in the SPLENDOR of the
MAGNIFICENT ROCKIES. Scenic PERFECTION via CANADIAN
NATIONAL RAILWAYS, the only way to TRAVEL in COMFORT
through the most MAGNIFICENT SCENERY in the WORLD.

Just lie back and let the grandeur of the Rockies
unfold before you as our train takes you through the beauty
of Jasper National Park. THAT'S travelling in STYLE.

The CNR and the GREATEST VIEW in the WORLD! What MORE
could you ask?"

Railroad brochure

Peter Slater came to Jasper on September 23, 1954. He
arrived in the dark, and in a blizzard, which made it
difficult to enjoy the scenic grandeur of the Rocky
Mountains. He made a mental note to throw out the Canadian
National Railways' leaflet he had picked up in Vancouver
that morning. It hadn't said a word about snowstorms, or
about having to carry his own bags into the Jasper depot at
two o'clock in the morning.

There was no one in the station when Peter stamped in,
sending little clumps of wet snow all over the flagstoned
floor. The steam-heated warmth of the station was welcome
after his brief chill outside and he shuddered slightly
with comfort. His next step, he decided, would be to take a

taxi and get to his hotel. The problem, then, was to find the cab rank. Since the rail lines were behind him, he reasoned, the street should lie on the opposite side. He walked across the lobby and set his suitcase down to look out the glass doors. Peering into the driving snow which flashed through the light of a single streetlamp, Peter could see no signs of traffic. So intent was he on the street that he failed to see the dark figure which suddenly loomed in the door. With a thump, the door whooshed inwards, missing the end of Peter's startled nose by a fraction of an inch, and a large, cloth-covered object cannoned into him.

"Oof," he said.

"Oops! Sorry." The other man grabbed Peter's arm just in time to keep him from falling sideways over his suitcase. A snowy hand flipped back a hood, revealing a round, brown face. Peter's new acquaintance was a broad-shouldered, medium-tall native male. "You okay?" he asked Peter with concern.

"Yeah. A little winded, but I'll live," Peter replied, rubbing his chest.

"Sorry about that," the man said, smiling. "I had my head down to keep the snow out of my eyes. Should look where I'm goin'. Sure you're all right?"

Peter nodded. "Sure."

The man patted him on the shoulder and went over to a

dutch door marked "Freight." The top half opened when he knocked and a bald head as round as a bowling ball appeared. A few wisps of graying hair were combed across the top of the head, evidently plastered down with oil, if the light Peter saw gleaming on them was anything to go by.

"Oh, it's you," said the bald man to the native. The contempt in his voice was thick. He lifted the stub of a black cigar to his moist lips and took a puff. "We don't need no goddam drunken Indians around here!"

Peter was stunned by the rude remark. What kind of a backwoods place had he come to? He held his breath, waiting for the native to leap over the half-door and attack Baldy.

"Go piss up a rope, white eyes," replied the Indian calmly. "Doris still kicking you out of bed for smoking that thing?"

"Shit, yeah," said the bald man, drawing in a lungful of smoke. "One night she tells me she's jealous of the attention it gets."

"What did you do?" asked the other man.

"I said Honey, so am I!" Baldy replied.

"Lucky she didn't kick you out of the house."

"You call that luck? Geez, you Indians is dumber than I figured," the bald man said amiably.

"Never said it was good luck, Phil," the native replied with a grin. "Saddle come in for me on the two o'clock?"

"Yeah, it's right here." Phil disappeared behind the half door and came up with a bulky package. "One express package for Manybears Enterprises. Sign here please, sir." He extended a clipboard.

"Sir?" the native said, signing. "Hey, I'm impressed. Keep treating your customers that way and maybe I won't have to take your scalp."

"Hah! You want what's left of it, you can have it! Got time for coffee?"

"Nah, thanks. I've got a bunch of rich Americans going out in the morning and old Solomon left me a saddle short this morning. He decided he hated the one he was wearing and managed to scrape it off. By the time he got finished kicking it, there wasn't much left." He took the saddle from the freight agent. "I'll take this one to the stable and get it ready."

"At this time of night?" Phil asked.

"The baby woke me up and I couldn't get back to sleep. Thought I might as well do something useful. G'night, Phil." Turning, he hoisted the package onto one shoulder.

"G'night, Willie." For the first time, bald Phil caught sight of Peter. "You waiting for something, mister?" he called.

"Just a cab."

"Gonna be a long wait --" he began, but Willie cut him off abruptly.

"Yeah, an awful long wait. No cabs in Jasper. This is a national park, mister. No cars allowed. Take care of that cold, now, Phil," he added as the bald man choked on his cigar.

"No cars allowed?" Peter couldn't believe it. He examined Willie's face for any signs of deceit, but the other man gazed back at him with wide, innocent eyes. He decided his leg was being pulled and nodded at the saddle. "So people around here ride horses everywhere," Peter said sarcastically.

Willie's mouth dropped open slightly, and he looked even more earnest. "Oh, we do. Either ride horses or walk. That's why this saddle," he hefted its weight on his shoulder, "was so important that I came down in the middle of the night. Heck, it took us years to get the warden to ban cars. Finally got it right after the second war. June 11, 1947, it was. It was the eleventh, Phil, wasn't it?"

"Before my time, Willie." That station agent ground his teeth into the cigar.

"Pretty sure it was the eleventh," Willie said thoughtfully. "And I know it was forty-seven, 'cause that's my sister Eileen's birthday and she turned twenty-one and she's, let's see, yeah, twenty-eight now. She said no cars in the park was the best present she could get." He chuckled. "And I say she's right. I never did like trucks and stuff."

Peter looked out at the street again. There were no cars and no tire tracks in the snow. No traffic lights he could see, and there was a hitching rail in front of the station. It was possible, he supposed.

"Well, I guess I can walk. Can either of you tell me how to get to the Athabasca Hotel?"

"Sure," replied Willie immediately, cutting Baldy off as he opened his mouth. "It's about two miles down the road, and across the creek."

"Creek?" Peter suddenly had a vision of himself floundering through the snowy dark and plunging into the water, suitcase and all, never to be seen again. He looked out into the blizzard and shivered. "Maybe I could just stay here until it gets light," he said uncertainly.

A peculiar noise brought his attention back into the lobby, where Willie was doubled over, leaning on his saddle, his sides heaving with laughter, and Phil was wiping tears from his eyes with one hand while clinging to the half door with the other. They were laughing quite hard, Peter noted with a reporter's detachment. Lights flashed in his eyes and a car pulled up at the curb. It bore the familiar markings of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

"No cars, huh? You bastards," Peter managed to hiss before the door opened and two large, uniformed men came in. The elder, a crooked-nosed man who wore sergeant's

stripes, looked at Willie and Phil panting in their efforts to regain their breath.

After an explanation of the joke, most of which Peter would rather have done without, Sergeant Jack McGillivray offered to give him a lift to the Athabasca. The constable with him, a muscular young man with the beginnings of a small moustache, was introduced as Constable Tim Carvers.

"Can't have newcomers walking all those miles through the blizzard," the sergeant said, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "You'd better ride with us, for your own safety. It's dangerous out there."

"Oh, yeah," said bald Phil, "with many bears walking around the streets at night." There was a peculiar emphasis in his voice which sounded like fear to Peter. Involuntarily he looked outside for lurking grizzlies.

"I thought bears hibernated during the winter," he stammered.

"Not all of them," Willie replied. "And it's not winter, yet. Just barely fall."

"Listen to him," said McGillivray. "He's our local expert on bears."

An encounter with a grizzly, at night, in a blizzard, on a two mile walk, ranked very low on Peter's list of important life experiences.

"I'll take that ride," he said.

McGillivray rubbed his nose more vigorously. "Good

idea," he said. "The woods are full of them."

Phil and Willie smiled their approval.

He should have known. It was a two block ride to the Athabasca. There was no creek.

"And I suppose the bears were a tall tale, too?" he asked as acidly as he could, between the snorts of laughter from the two police officers as they pulled up before the hotel. To his surprise, they laughed even harder.

"Hell, no," gasped McGillivray. "Many bears was out tonight."

"Real dangerous guy, Willie Manybears," Carvers added.

The look on Peter's face, visible in the streetlight, just sent them into fresh gales of laughter. Eventually, he managed to join them.

Tim Carvers carried his suitcases in from the car, a chore he did with enviable ease, confirming Peter's suspicions that the constable was a very strong young man. McGillivray came in with them.

"Public relations," he said.

The lobby was deserted except for two people: a small, weary-looking man and a massive, red-faced woman in an army surplus jacket who filled an imitation Louis Quinze armchair to bursting. The man was bending over her, talking earnestly. She was paying no attention at all to him, being too busy smiling beatifically at a moose head on the other wall.

"Hello, Leo," said the broken-nosed sergeant, strolling across the lobby to join the pair. "Any trouble?"

Leo straightened up with a sigh of relief. "Hi, Jack. Glad to see you. Rosy doesn't want to go home. Ever."

"Oh ho," said McGillivray softly. He began to move towards the woman, then stopped. "She hasn't started to hum yet, has she?" he asked Leo with some trace of what Peter could have sworn was apprehension.

"Not a peep," confirmed Leo with a tired smile. "Do you think I'd be standing here if she had?"

"Good." McGillivray bent over the woman and took her hand. "Rosy," he called softly. "Rosy. It's Jack McGillivray, dear."

Peter was surprised to hear genuine affection in the sergeant's voice.

Rosy rolled her head slowly to the source of this new noise and her smile widened.

"Jack. You've come for me."

"That's right, hon. Now we're going to take you home."

Her brow clouded. "Don't wanna go home. I like it here. Nice and warm. Gonna sleep now." She pulled her hand free, crossed her arms, and settled back in the chair with her eyes closed.

McGillivray turned and shrugged his shoulders. "Sorry, Leo, she's settled in for the night."

The other sighed. "It's okay, Jack. I'll get a blanket

and cover her up."

Carvers snorted and put Peter's bags down with a thump. His moustache almost managed to bristle, Peter noticed with interest.

"Did you want to say something, constable?" McGillivray asked.

"Sir, the woman is obviously drunk. We should stick her in cells until she sobers up."

"Is that what they teach you at Depot" (Peter could hear the capital) "these days?" The non-com's voice had an edge, but Carvers held his ground.

"Yes, sir."

McGillivray turned to Peter. "Constable Carvers has just joined us from the training depot in Regina, which is why he is calling me sir, instead of sergeant. How long has it been now, Tim? Eight days?"

"Yes, sir . . . sergeant."

"And you think our duty requires us to arrest this woman?" McGillivray rubbed the bridge of his nose with his index finger.

"That's what I was taught, sergeant." The constable drew himself to attention. "Whether the lady hums or not."

McGillivray smiled and stepped aside.

"All right, Tim. By all means, do your duty."

As Carvers moved forward, Leo circled casually behind the solid protection of the lobby counter. McGillivray

strolled over to stand beside him, taking the sleeve of Peter's coat as he went by and drew the newcomer gently along, so the three of them stood on the side of the lobby away from where Carvers approached the now-snoring Rosy.

"Miss." Carvers started off gently, then built in volume. "Miss. Rosy. Rosy!" He took her shoulder and shook her. "Wake up now!"

When Rosy's eyes opened, Carvers stopped shaking her and straightened up.

"Miss," he said formally, "I am placing you under arrest for public intoxication."

Rosy closed her eyes and began to hum. McGillivray and Leo exchanged a look. The sergeant sighed, and began to take off his coat. Oblivious, Carvers reached out two big hands and laboriously hauled the fat woman to her feet. In spite of all his young strength, the effort forced him to brace his feet wide for leverage. He almost had her standing up when Rosy smiled, opened her eyes, turned slightly, and kneed him in the groin. With the noise and gentle motion of a hot-air balloon deflating, he settled slowly to the floor, as Rosy dropped back into her chair with a thump.

"Oh, hell," said McGillivray. "You two look after him, will you?" He set his coat on the counter and went over to where the fat woman again sat enthroned in triumph over her victim.

"Rosy, you shouldn't have done that," he said sorrowingly. She smiled at him, still humming. "Now I've got to take you in for assaulting an officer. Come on, now."

"Anything for you, Jack" she crooned, hauling herself up out of the chair to loop a casual right fist (Peter had seen smaller beef roasts) at the sergeant's crotch. A lady with a one-track mind, Peter noted. McGillivray pivoted smoothly, blocked her blow with his thigh, and used the momentum of his turn to deliver a powerful left hook of his own. Rosy landed next to Carvers, who had begun to make an unearthly keening noise.

"Damn," said McGillivray, shaking his hand. "That hurt."

Leo, Peter, and McGillivray managed to get both Carvers and Rosy out to the car. The young constable went in the back ("in case he barfs," McGillivray explained) and the woman into the front seat. When they finished, Peter checked his watch. It was 3:15. He had a job interview in less than six hours.

"Thanks for your help, Mr. Slater," called the sergeant as he opened the driver's door. "And welcome to Jasper!"

Chapter two

Over coffee at the Sunrise Cafe the next morning, Peter finished describing his first hour in Jasper to his new boss.

"Then the sergeant -- "

"McGillivray," interrupted Bill Tollstrup, publisher of the Jasper Journal, a pudgy man who moved and spoke with an air of brusque authority.

" . . . McGillivray and Leo pushed Rosy's butt into the police car and off they went."

"Rosy'll be all right. She's a tough old bird. Sort of runs the sanitary landfill site."

"The what?"

"The town dump," Bill explained. "She salvages stuff people throw out. Helps keep the bears away, too, in the summer. When they wander in she chases 'em off with her shotgun. Just fires in the air and they run away."

Peter was confused. "She has a shotgun - in a national park? Is that allowed?"

"Hell, no," said his boss. "But you've seen her in action. Nobody's got the balls to take the thing away from her. Except maybe McGillivray, and he's got a soft spot for her." Peter's mind balked at the thought of the broken-nosed sergeant being fond of the formidable Rosy. His new boss went on. "How is Constable Carvers, anyway?"

Peter shuddered. "He was the most remarkable shade of green when I last saw him. Poor bastard. McGillivray promised me he'd live, though."

"Hell of an introduction, ain't it?" Tollstrup grinned, leaning back comfortably in the orange leatherette booth. His idea of a job interview had been to shake Peter's hand, say "Thank God, somebody's come to do the dirty work," and introduce him to the other two people who worked at the paper, Arnie Sleeve the pressman, and Elsie Fulcher, who ran the office. Elsie was a rounded, fiftyish woman with unhappy eyes.

"Place couldn't run without Elsie," Bill said. "She handles all the paperwork: accounts, classified ads, payroll. Keeps the whole shebang running like a top. Our very own wonder girl, that's her. Anything you need, you let her know."

Elsie blushed at the praise and looked pleased.

"I'll be glad to help out any way I can," she said in soft, fervent tones. "But Mr. Tollstrup knows that. Welcome to the Jasper Journal, Peter." She shook his hand in her dry, plump one.

Arnie Sleeve did not offer a hand, but that was okay with Peter, since the pressman had his both deep in the greasy innards of a disassembled linotype machine. Arnie chewed on the toothpick stuck in his mouth and grunted, "Hi."

Peter felt he had to say something. "Problem with the equipment?"

"Always problems with this piece of shit." Arnie turned his attention back to the machinery, and Bill suggested going out for coffee. When the boss asked Peter how he liked Jasper so far, Peter filled him in on what had happened that morning. When he finished, Bill drained his cup and set it down decisively.

"Yup, Jasper's quite a place, and it might take a little getting used to." He raised a commanding finger. "Listen, my boy, and you shall gain wisdom." He was only half kidding, Peter realized.

"Jasper," Bill went on, "is nosy. We've got four thousand gossips here. Everybody wants to know everything about everybody else. And they all have contacts you don't. You thought you had competition for news in Vancouver? Huh. Only scoop you're going to get around here is vanilla. Can you live with that?"

Peter, who had been a junior city hall reporter at the Vancouver Chronicle when it collapsed and flooded the local job market with out-of-work reporters, didn't see that he had a lot of choice. "I suppose so," he said.

"Were you in the service?" Bill asked.

"Yeah. The army. Korea."

"Then you know how bad the army is for rumors. This place," Bill jerked his thumb in the direction of Rita's

lunch counter, a motion which took in the worn arborite table tops and well-used chairs, and the other morning coffee customers in their winter coats, "-- this place, is home to world champions."

He leaned back. "Last spring people were worried we might have some kind of flood in the Athabasca. Bingo! We get a rumor. CNR is going to blow up the bridges if the water gets too high. People were calling me to say they'd seen the charges placed."

"And?" Peter was cautious.

Bill snorted. "And nothing, that's what. No explosives, no plans. Nothing but the rumor. It sure makes being a reporter interesting. Tough but interesting."

Peter thought he knew a warning when he heard one, and he badly needed this job. If Bill Tollstrup wanted to employ a real professional, that's what Peter Slater would be for him.

"Bill, I can promise you that no such unsubstantiated stories will ever run in any newspaper where I am a reporter!" he declared, feeling a little pompous.

His boss's eyes narrowed.

"Why not? You want me to go out of business?" Bill relaxed and assumed an amused smile. "You don't really think people read the paper to find out the truth, do you?"

Up until that moment, that was exactly what Peter had thought, but he was smart enough not to say it.

That afternoon, Peter's new landlady, Mrs. Catherine McNeil, accepted the first week's rent from him. The place had been recommended by Bill Tollstrup. "She's a good cook, clean as a pin, and a good soul. You'll like it." Mrs. McNeil had turned out to be a small, spare woman with gleaming eyes, and deeply nicotine-stained fingers. She looked up at Peter expectantly from the table in her spotless kitchen and lit a fresh cigarette from the ashes of the old one.

"So you're not married yet, Peter?"

"Not yet, no."

There was a kindly smile on her face as the smoke trickled out of her nose and gently up her cheeks.

"What a shame. A nice-looking boy like you. I suppose if you're not engaged, you've probably got a steady back home?"

"No, nobody like that."

"Well, don't worry." Mrs. McNeil patted his arm in in what was meant to be a comforting manner. "We'll soon fix that. Do you like shepherd's pie? Dinner's at half past six." The briefest of pauses. "Unless you've got plans for the night? A date, maybe?"

It didn't take long for him to discover that being nosy about newcomers was a way of life in Jasper. At the post office that first week, the clerk stared intently at him when he reached the general delivery wicket.

"Anything for Peter Slater?" he asked.

"Slater? You new in town?" The postal clerk, an older man with a frosty-white brush cut, examined him carefully.

The buzz of conversation in the post office stopped. Peter could feel the eyes of those in line behind him boring into his back.

"Yes. Just arrived."

"Where you working?" Pause. "Need to know in case your stuff gets sent there by mistake."

"I'm at the Journal."

"And before that?"

"I was with the Chronicle in Vancouver where I was a city hall reporter!"

The clerk gave him a hurt look.

"I only needed to know what city, Mr. Slater. I wasn't prying or anything. Nothing for you today."

The talk began again as he left the building.

He couldn't even get away from it when he went to buy cigarettes.

"Players, please."

"Navy man, eh?" asked the woman behind the counter.

"Beg your pardon?" Peter couldn't follow her train of thought.

"You were in the navy, I bet. All the old salts smoke Players."

"No, I wasn't in the navy. I just like them," he

"Serves me right for sticking my nose in. Mind your own business, that's what I keep telling myself. Army, eh? How come we haven't seen you around the Legion?"

Even on his morning walk to the paper, half a dozen people would wish him good morning and inquire after his health. By mid-October, he'd decided that he had to do something about the situation. He bought a car, a '47 De Soto which set him back two hundred dollars. He thought the privacy would be worth it, but it took so long to warm up that after the first week he started leaving it at home. Instead, he decided to get up an hour earlier and walk to work before anyone else was on the street. It seemed like a simple solution that should let him get to the office relatively unpestered. He'd reckoned without Mrs. McNeil. When he told her he wanted breakfast an hour earlier, she immediately reached the conclusion that the bed she had supplied wasn't wasn't comfortable enough for him.

"No, no," he said, thinking fast. "I'm impressing the boss, getting in early. You know how it is on a new job, more things to do than you can handle." She'd nodded and the challenged look left her face, to Peter's relief.

But what started off as a story turned out to be the truth. Peter quickly found that he had as much work to do, and more, than he suggested to his bright-eyed landlady. Everything in the news was his responsibility, local and national: wars, elections, earthquakes, fires, thefts, bar

fights, council meetings, Rotary lunches, high school plays, births, deaths, arrivals and departures - Peter had to deal with it all. He had to get and write every local story and edit all the news coming from outside sources. And take, develop and print the pictures to accompany the stories. And edit the copy. And lay out the paper. And write the headlines. His extra hour was as busy as he had claimed that it would be.

Peter had so much to do, in fact, that he almost missed the wire service item about Jasper. One Monday morning, he was doing his check of Canadian Press stories. Even when the office was closed over the weekend, the CP teleprinter clattered almost ceaselessly, spewing out reams of material -- every story filed with the press syndicate anywhere in the world. By the time Peter came to the office on Monday, the accumulation was vast, and he had to go through it all to see if there was any news that the Jasper Journal could use. There was so much: treaty negotiations over French Indo-China, scores from the NHL, a minor scandal on Parliament Hill, a crackpot prediction from some rocket scientist that man would walk on the moon this century, a speech on a dam building project near Jasper --

"Jasper?" Peter was so startled he almost spilled his coffee.

"Well, I'll be," he said out loud to the empty office. He shook his head to clear it and double checked. Yes,

there it was, "Jasper" in black and white. He picked up his blue pencil and began to read.

MOOSE JAW (CP) "I'm going to drag Jasper kicking and screaming into the 1950's," an enthusiastic Stanislaus Mickliewiecz told the Progress Club of Moose Jaw at its monthly meeting yesterday.

Mickliewiecz, a former combat engineer who built bridges under enemy fire in the mountains of Italy, has vowed to take on an even bigger challenge in the Rocky Mountains of his adoptive land.

"The problem with people in places like Jasper is their attitude," Mickliewiecz told an audience of almost 200 gathered at the York Hotel. "They cling to old ways in the belief that they are good enough."

"My mission will be to persuade the people of Jasper to allow modern science and technology to improve their lives."

Mickliewiecz has been hired to oversee the damming of an unusual lake in Jasper National Park.

"Medicine Lake drains from the bottom through cracks in the lake bed," he said. He explained that the lake dries out during the height of the tourist season, stopping the ferry service on the lake. The operators of a nearby resort who count on the ferry to supply them with customers have been losing money as a result. They've hired Mickliewiecz

to do something about it.

"I will solve their problems with science," he declared.

Members of the Progress Club greeted his address with thunderous applause, and club president Charles Feeney presented Mickliewiecz with a engraved pewter beer mug as a token of appreciation.

When he finished reading, Peter felt a sense of wonder. Hundreds of miles away, a man calls the people of Jasper backward and old-fashioned, and modern technology passes on the insult overnight. "Isn't science wonderful?" he asked the office. Journal readers would certainly be interested in seeing what Mickliewiecz had said about their town. It might even go on the front page. A thought struck Peter, and he stopped in mid-edit. With a little work, and a couple of long distance telephone calls, this story would be front page material, maybe even one of the biggest stories of the year. The excitement of tracking down news flowed through him, and he took a sheet of blank paper to outline his plan of attack.

Twenty minutes later, when Bill Tollstrup came briskly through the front door, Peter was waiting for him.

"Look at this!" the reporter demanded, thrusting the wire story under his boss's nose. Tollstrup grabbed the sheet of paper and gave it a rapid glance.

"Looks fine," he said. "Stick it on page three."

"Three?" Peter was surprised. The third page was traditionally reserved for less important stories. "I thought we could use it on the front page."

"Wire copy out of Moose Jaw? Only if we want to bore our readers," Bill said. "I told you front page is for local interest and big national stories."

"But if you'd let me call these people in Moose Jaw --," Peter managed to get out before Bill interrupted him.

"Call Moose Jaw? Do you have any idea how much that would cost? 'Way too much money. Sorry, no can do."

"But this is real news," Peter protested. "I could talk to businessmen, get some angry reactions, good quotes - give it a real local angle."

"Nah," said Bill. "We've got all we need for the front page this week." He ticked the items off on his fingers. "The Hallowe'en dress up pictures from the school, an interview with the new chief warden, and a fight at the school board meeting. That's plenty." The publisher gave Peter a quick pat on the shoulder as he went into his office. Peter followed him in.

"Keep your eyes open, though, Pete," Bill said. "When that engineer guy comes to Jasper, then you can interview him in person." He gave Peter a superior grin. "That will be real local news - and it won't cost an extra cent." He handed the story back. "Remember, long distance costs

money. We pay enough to CP without having to spend more to check their facts."

Peter still didn't understand.

"You're going to bounce this," he gestured with the story, "from the front page for kids with sheets over their heads?"

"You bet. Sort of stuff everybody likes. And what they like, they buy. Good for business. Keep up the good work, kiddo. Just don't spend us both out of a job." Bill sat down at his desk, then snapped his fingers. "Hey, I almost forgot. There's a lady doctor in town; that's real news for you. She's just started practicing at the clinic. Set up an interview. It'll make a great story."

Peter was caught short by the sudden change of topic.

"A woman doctor? But that's not news," he protested. " 'Black man goes to college' is news. Women have been practicing medicine in Canada for what? Twenty years now?"

"Not in Jasper," Bill replied. "She's our first. Call her this week, do up a real nice feature. You know, how happy she is to be in Jasper, what her favorite color is, that sort of human interest stuff. Now get out of here and let me get some work done."

Peter left the office in a foul mood. To have Bill relegate his engineer to the third page was bad enough, but to be stuck with "a nice feature" on top of it was almost too much. Real reporters did not have to do "nice" stories

about lady doctors or school Hallowe'en parties, he told himself, going back to his desk in a sulk, only idiots who ended up at little papers like this.

He slapped the CP story down on the desk in frustration. Typical of Jasper, he thought. In the real world, women have been practicing medicine for twenty years. In this hole, it's such a big deal that they actually think it's news. A defiant idea struck him.

"If it's a human interest story Bill wants, a human interest story he shall have," he said to himself. He'd show Bill Tollstrup what a professional reporter could do with that type of assignment, by God! He grabbed a notebook and began jotting down a series of hard-hitting questions for the lady doctor. Why had she chosen medicine instead of nursing? How was Jasper treating a woman in a man's profession? What did she think of socialized medicine? Why was she practicing in a backwoods town like this? He filled several pages, making a silent vow that there would be no soft soap peddled under his by-line. When the paper came out next week, he told himself, Jasper would know everything about Dr. Delta Mackenzie but her favorite color.

Chapter 3

The adrenalin pumping through his system might have made him forgetful when he called the lady doctor for an appointment. If he had been thinking clearly, he never would have agreed to an interview on a Wednesday afternoon.

Wednesday was complaint day.

The paper was printed on Tuesday afternoons, and the run was usually complete by four or five p.m. Peter would ritually bring the first two papers from the print shop into his boss's office and hand one to Bill, accepting in return a shot of cheap rye from the bottle the publisher kept locked in the filing cabinet under "T" for Tuesday. Bill would propose a toast -- "Here's mud in your ear" -- then they would sit down to read.

The drink was partly to celebrate and partly to help prepare them for the weekly ordeal that was Wednesday, the day everyone else in Jasper got their copy of the Journal, and found all of the things in it that they didn't like and picked up their telephones or made their way down to the office to "speak to whoever is responsible for this item, please."

The parade had been even longer than usual that particular Wednesday. All of the regulars had called in, including Peter's least favorite, a woman with an upper class British accent who was fighting a one-person battle

to defend the Empire from the cultural encroachment of its neighbors to the south. ("We are not Americans, young man, and there is no earthly reason, save ignorance, why tyre should be spelled with an 'i'.") Today she'd even been upset over the story on the dam project. "You should not print such items. Construction projects in a national park? I will do everything in my power to stop it," she'd told a bemused Peter.

But hers was not the only complaining voice. There had been three telephone inquiries in tones ranging from genuine curiosity to one step short of outrage, on why Peter had not covered the weekend camp suffered by the local Boy Scout troop. All three turned a deaf ear to his explanation that he had other assignments in town Saturday and Sunday.

"But you didn't go, either," Peter had pointed out to the most polite of the three, a teacher named Midland.

"I have marking to do on weekends." Mr. Midland's tone was of the sweet reasonableness normally reserved for the dim-witted. "By the way, in February we're planning real winter survival outing. No tents, no sleeping bags, just lean-tos out in the snow. The boys will look forward to seeing you. I'm sure you won't want to disappoint them - and all your other readers. Good-bye."

Peter slammed down the telephone in fury. "Don't these people realize I have a life, too? When am I supposed to

have a day off? Nineteen sixty-five?" he asked Elsie Fulcher, who had come through from the front office and was now standing in front of his desk. She opened her mouth, but he spoke first.

"Just once, Elsie, I would like somebody to say 'please' when they call." His voice began to rise. "I would like it if they had some consideration for my feelings. If they said please or kept the appointments they made. Is it asking too much to be treated with a little courtesy?!"

"Funny you should mention that," she answered, unruffled. "The clinic called to ask why you didn't show up for your three o'clock interview -- "

"Ohmygod," Peter said, immediately checking the clock. It was twenty after. He leaped to his feet, grabbed his coat, picked up his camera and bolted from the office, stuffing pen and notebook into his pocket as he went. He headed up the street like he'd been shot from a cannon, fighting to get his coat on against the freezing blast of the wind and dodging other pedestrians like a crazed Gene Kelly.

The eight-block run to Jasper's sole medical clinic left him panting and sweaty with exertion and embarrassment. He burst into the crowded waiting room, and all conversation stopped as everyone turned to stare at him. He could feel the flush climbing up his neck and his ears burned as he stood before the receptionist. He was

acutely conscious of the trickles of perspiration running down his head and neck.

The receptionist, a large woman in nurse's whites and a knitted purple cardigan, asked his business disapprovingly

"I'm from the Journal," Peter said. "I'm here to interview Dr. Mackenzie. I'm late," he added lamely.

The receptionist pursed her lips and consulted the schedule in front of her.

"You were supposed to be here half an hour ago," she said in a voice which carried throughout the room. Peter became uncomfortably aware of the receptive silence behind him.

"Yes, I know," he said as politely as he could. "I'm really sorry about that. Is there any chance I could see the doctor?" he asked. A drop of sweat ran down his nose and dripped onto the appointment book on the receptionist's desk. She mopped it with a fastidious tissue before reaching for the telephone.

"The man from the newspaper is here," she announced into it. She obviously restrained herself from adding "Finally." "Do you have time to see him today? All right, if you're sure." She hung up and met Peter's eye.

"The doctor will come and get you in a minute. You can sit there" -- indicating a chair directly in front of her -- "until she's ready."

Not having much choice, Peter sat. The plastic of the chair pushed his damp shirt clammily onto his back. Sweat fell into his eye, blurring his vision and making him blink.

"Mr. Slater?" A white figure stood over him. He couldn't focus on it but the voice was female. He stood up quickly, cracking his elbow painfully on the arm of the chair.

"I'm Doctor Mackenzie," the woman said. "We can talk in my office." Peter followed her, blinking and dabbing at his face with the sleeve of his coat. He wished he could stop sweating. Behind him, he could practically hear the sound of the receptionist's eyebrows rising, and he wondered what stories about him would be circulating at her dinner table tonight.

The doctor waved off his apology for being late.

"Don't worry about it. I would have been half an hour late with my patients, and I'm clear for the rest of the afternoon," she said.

"What about everybody in the waiting room?" Peter asked.

"They're all here to see the other doctors." She smiled ruefully. "One of the advantages of a new practice, if you can call it that. I'm not swamped the way the rest of my colleagues are. Not yet, anyway. Oh, you're not going to put that in the story, are you?"

"I won't write down anything until I open my notebook," Peter assured her. His vision finally cleared and he got his first good look at his interview subject.

She sat across a large desk from him with her back to a small window. Her red hair was tucked up at the back of her neck and there was a dusting of faded freckles across the top of her cheeks. She wore little make up, and her blue eyes blinked rapidly. She's nervous, Peter noted with some surprise. He wiped his forehead.

"Would you like a tissue?" she said, offering a box.

"Thank you," he said, grabbing one in time to catch an annoying trickle which had reached his right eyebrow. "I guess this will teach me to keep an eye on the clock. When I discovered how late I was, I ran all the way over. Next time, I'll be ready early enough to get the car warmed up. I really am sorry."

"No harm done," Dr. Mackenzie replied cheerfully.

"Would you like a cup of coffee, or do you want to get started now?"

"Now would be fine," Peter said, regaining his composure with every minute. Here was his chance to show this woman what a professional he really was, how a real reporter operated. He flipped open his notebook to the first of his tough questions. The page was completely blank. His stomach lurched. He turned the book over and started from the back. Blanks there, too. He'd brought the

wrong notepad. All his carefully thought out work was still on his desk. And, he realized, he couldn't recall any of the questions he'd come up with - not one.

Peter sighed.

"So," he began, "what's your favorite color?"

It was the only thing he could think of to say.

"Blue," she said, and waited.

"How long have you been in Jasper?"

"About six weeks now."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven."

"How do you like Jasper so far?"

"It's really nice. The mountains, you know." She gestured toward the window. "The scenery."

"Yes," he answered. "Dr. Mackenzie . . ."

"Call me Delta."

"Delta. Where are you from, originally?"

"Originally? Montreal."

Peter saw this was going to be like pulling teeth. Doctor Delta could give lessons in the art of withholding information. He tried desperately to recall the tough questions from the other notebook but nothing came to mind. After only twenty minutes of questioning he had forced Delta to admit that she was the only daughter of a McGill history professor and a music teacher, she studied science at McGill before deciding to go into medicine, she had

trained in London, and she wanted to specialize in pediatrics. He made a mental note to check the spelling of pediatrics when he went back to the paper.

"What made you choose medicine as a career?" Peter asked. He knew there was something he was supposed to add, but could not think what.

Delta hesitated, eyeing his notebook before answering.

"I wanted to help others," she said Peter slowly wrote down her response, selfishly hoping that the silence would make her uncomfortable and prompt her to add more detail. He looked up. Delta had her hands on her desk, and she smiled patiently at him. He sighed and dredged around for more questions. Damn, he thought, this is awful. But at least I've stopped sweating.

"So," he said, "how do you like Jasper?"

"It's very nice. The mountains are lovely and the people are so friendly. It's just that . . .," she paused. Peter had a flash of insight, that she was finally going to say something controversial, something newsworthy.

"Yes, go on," he urged her.

"Well, that's the third time you've asked me that question," she said.

"It is?" Peter said numbly. She nodded. He checked his notes. She was right.

"Damn," he said, shaking his head in frustration. "You must think I'm an idiot."

"No, I don't," she answered, to his surprise.

"Why not?" he asked. "I forget about the interview, I show up late, I sweat all over your office, and I ask the same dumb questions over and over."

She laughed. "I thought you were just having a bad day."

"Boy, is that an understatement," Peter said half to himself. Delta raised her eyebrows. "Wednesdays are a tough day at the paper, and this was one of the worst," he explained.

"You sound like you need a coffee break."

"I need a vacation," Peter answered. "But I'd settle for coffee. Are you offering?"

"Sure," she said. "I'd like some myself. Besides, remember, I've got no more patients. Now, don't put that in the story."

Peter stood up and slid his notes into his pocket.

"I probably should," he said. "But some days you just have to know when you've been beaten. This reporter is on vacation as of two minutes ago. Where do you want to go for coffee?"

"We've got a perk in the lunch room, if you don't mind staying here?"

"Fine with me," said Peter. "Lead on."

The coffee went down quickly as they exchanged stories of their first days in Jasper, sitting on wooden stacking

chairs at the plain table in the lunchroom. When Delta offered a second cup, Peter had a twinge of conscience. He knew he should get back to the office to deal with complaints, but he would much rather stay with the red-headed lady doctor, who didn't complain about him. Temptation beckoned, and he gave in.

"Yeah, thanks. Anything to avoid the office on a Wednesday afternoon."

After pouring, Doctor Delta leaned her elbows on the table and blew on her coffee.

"What's so awful about Wednesday afternoons? That's the second time you've mentioned it."

So he told her about Wednesdays, about the complaints and the corrections, the demands and the screw-ups.

"Every story I write is put out there for people to read. And somebody, somewhere, always finds at least one major mistake. That's the newspaper business."

"I'd hate that," she said with some feeling. "Why on earth do you keep doing it?"

"I don't know. I guess you get used to it after a while." Peter checked the level of coffee in his cup. "I haven't yet, or I wouldn't be sitting here, waiting for them to stop calling. It's funny. Every week, I know I'm going to catch hell from someone. But I don't want to stop."

"Is it worth it? In spite of the complaints?"

"Yeah. I guess it is," he admitted.

"Why?" she asked. He looked up to meet her steady blue eyes. And found himself telling her what he had never told anyone else, about his dream of owning his own newspaper, running it his way, accepting the mistakes and plunging ahead regardless. Unnoticed, the hands of his watch ticked steadily on towards five o'clock.

"We'd carry a slogan on the front page in twenty-four point type: 'There is no Perfect Newspaper.' Then I'd print huge apologies for everything we did wrong." He chuckled. "Some weeks there wouldn't be any room for news. Besides, sometimes it's the screw-ups that make things fun."

"Fun? How could it be fun?"

Peter realized he was enjoying himself. It was the first time since he'd come to Jasper that someone had been not just nosy but interested in what he actually thought.

"Well, take the time we ran a cutline - that's the caption under a picture - that said 'Sister Mary Ignatius entertains on the violin at the Sacred Heart Talent competition.' " He was grinning at the memory.

"You spelled her name wrong?" Delta guessed, smiling back.

"Oh, no, we spelled it all right. But it was a picture of a bearded guy named Jacob Thomas playing the accordion!"

"And I thought the funny things about newspapers were the comics," Delta laughed. "The only newspaper joke I know

is what's black and white and red all over."

"Do you know what else is black and white and red all over?"

"No, what?"

"A sunburnt zebra." And she smiled again, even while she told him what a dreadful joke it was, and smiled more when he agreed with her.

"But I've been doing all the talking. What about you? Why did you come to Jasper?" he asked.

"I wanted something different when I finished my internship," she said. "This place fit the bill. It's a small town, in the west, in the mountains, in a park. When they offered me a job, I jumped at it. After Montreal and London, I thought I'd spent enough time in big cities."

"Any regrets about it?"

"Not really. Sometimes I'd like to have a nice bottle of wine or go dancing somewhere besides the Legion, but usually there are too many other things to do, too many people to see."

That was certainly a new way of looking at Jasper.

"Why did you decide to become a doctor?" Peter had finally remembered what he had meant to ask during the interview. Delta raised one eyebrow and looked amused.

"You mean why didn't I become a nurse?"

He had to be honest. "Yeah, I guess that is what I meant."

"Promise you won't put it in the paper?"

"Scout's honor." He had time to wonder at his own change of heart. An hour ago, he would have written this into a story without a qualm.

Delta tilted her head and looked off to one side before answering. Then she nodded.

"Okay," she said. "I didn't want to take orders from doctors. I wanted to give the orders." A determined look tightened her features, then softened into a smile, and she fiddled with her coffee spoon. The smile became a grin.

"Do you want to know how I ended up going to London for med school instead of a Canadian university?"

"How? Tell me."

"Off the record? For real?"

He held up his two empty hands. "No notebook, no pen. We're off the record."

Even then she hesitated, and when she finally spoke, there was an underlay of quiet bitterness to her voice.

"Canadian schools didn't want me," she said. "I had good marks in science and I did well on the med school admission test. A man with my marks would have been a shoo-in. But, because I was a woman, my own university wouldn't even answer my application. At another, they told me they wouldn't have considered me at all, but they thought Delta might be a man's name."

"That's stupid," Peter said.

"Actually, I'm sort of glad they turned me down," Delta replied, picking up her empty cup and staring into it. "If they weren't bright enough to tell Delta was a woman's name, I didn't want them teaching me medicine."

She told him about sending off fifty applications to medical schools throughout the English-speaking world and collecting almost fifty rejection letters. Finally, two schools invited her to interviews. The recollection of the first made her smile.

"I was desperate," she said. "I decided I was going to do whatever it took to get into a medical program. I knew there were programs that accepted women, so all I had to do was find them, figure out what they wanted, and give it to them." Her lips tightened. "I thought I could manage to lie for as long as the interview took."

"You could always wash your mouth out with soap afterwards," Peter chipped in.

"I damn near had to," she answered. "The interview was in Toronto. I didn't know what to expect, but at least they weren't surprised when I turned out to be female."

"That was a start," Peter said. "So today wasn't your first interview. I knew you were holding out on me."

He was relieved when that made her laugh.

"Yeah, I was keeping secrets from you," Delta said. "Actually, they did ask me one of the same questions you did."

"Which one?"

"They wanted to know why I wanted to be a doctor."

"What did you tell them?"

She smiled. "Same thing I told you, about helping people."

"Well, I was impressed." Peter thought he could be forgiven for his little white lie.

"They didn't seem to be," Delta said. "They weren't as nice as you about it, either. The committee wanted to know why I couldn't help people as a nurse."

Peter hoped she couldn't see him blush. He was relieved he'd left the notebook with that question was still sitting on his desk.

"What did you say?" he asked quickly.

Then she told him the story she had told the committee, of how her mother had almost died while Delta was being born. How the only medical help available in the remote northern town where her parents lived was a practical nurse who had botched the delivery so badly that her mother could have no more children. How she grew up determined that no other woman should ever have to go through her mother's experience because only a nurse was available to help.

"I finished up by telling them," she snorted, "practically promising them, that if they let me in I would specialize in obstetrics and gynecology."

"So what happened?" Peter was fascinated.

"They turned me down. Wished me well, but said I was too emotionally involved to make a good doctor." She smiled with what Peter thought was resignation. He almost burst with indignation at the nameless committee.

"What a bunch of fatheads!" he said. "Didn't they have any brains at all?" A thought struck him. "A northern town? Isn't your family from Montreal?" Had he missed something?

Delta giggled.

"They are from Montreal," she said. "I was lying through my teeth!"

"You made the whole thing up?" Peter was delighted.

"Pretty awful, huh?" Her grin was shameless.

"It's great!" he said, and started to laugh.

"I was finally accepted by an English teaching hospital," Delta went on after a minute. "I guess they were desperate for foreign exchange right after the war."

"Or maybe you finally stumbled on some people who had some sense," Peter offered.

Delta made a face. "Yeah, maybe. Funny thing is, I did end up doing a lot of obstetrics and gynecology." The grin returned. "But I was in the perfect spot for it."

Peter had to know. "Where was that?"

"Guy's Hospital."

As they giggled over the name of the hospital, something clicked into place in Peter's head. Suddenly he

was scared. He realized how small the card table was. It couldn't have been more than a couple of inches across that table top, where Delta's blue eyes seemed to take up so much room. Obviously, he was crowding her. He stood abruptly and stepped back just as Delta got up, too.

"Well!"

Peter checked his watch and was startled to discover it was after six o'clock.

"Look at the time! I've gotta get going," he said.

"Me, too."

"Thanks for the coffee."

"Anytime. Boy, it's late, isn't it? When I get started, I guess I talk too much," Delta said.

"I don't think so."

He found himself gazing into her eyes and quickly looked away.

"I'll look forward to seeing the story."

"Wednesday," he said.

"I'll be sure to call and complain Wednesday at one on the dot," she said mischievously.

"I'll make sure I'm out on an assignment."

"Coward."

"That's me," he said and glanced at his watch again.

"I really have to get back to the paper."

She led the way to her office, and he picked up his hat and coat. His camera sat on the floor where he had left

it.

"Darn," he said. "I'm forgetting everything today. Can I take a quick picture?"

Her hand went up to her hair. "Do you have to?" she said.

Peter smiled. "I feel the same way. But I should get a shot. It'll only take a second, and it won't hurt a bit. I've always wanted to say that to a doctor."

"Haha," she said. "Okay. At my desk?"

He took a single flash picture of Delta sitting behind her desk, hands folded, looking straight into the camera. An idea came to him as he popped the hot flash bulb out of the reflector.

"Uh, can I walk you home?" Peter asked, suddenly nervous. He tossed the bulb at Delta's garbage can and missed.

"No, thanks," Delta said, bending down quickly to retrieve the bulb. "It's only a couple of blocks." She tossed it into the trash, and they both watched it land.

In silence, he helped her on with her coat, trying very hard not to think about how close she was. It didn't work. Outside, a sudden gust of chill wind prevented more than the briefest farewell. Peter made his way back to his warm, quiet, empty, office and started to work. It was a relief to be back in familiar territory. So why, he wondered, did he feel disappointed at being there?

Chapter four

Remembrance Day was a Thursday, and Stanislaus Mickliewiecz was due to present a wreath at the cenotaph on behalf of the veterans of the Royal Canadian Engineers at the invitation of the Jasper Chamber of Commerce. Peter had been thinking about Mickliewiecz since the CP article on the Medicine Lake project had disappeared into the obscurity of page three. Word of the engineer's imminent arrival had come Tuesday through Romeo Slipchuk, Jasper's popular mortician and chamber president.

"He's actually coming for a preliminary look at the dam site," Romeo told Peter on the telephone, "but we managed to persuade him to take part in the ceremony."

"Why?" Peter asked. He didn't see how Mickliewiecz fit in with Jasper's memorial ceremony.

"How many distinguished combat veterans do we have in Jasper?" Romeo countered.

"Thirty? Forty?" Peter wasn't quite sure.

"Exactly. And how many of them are going to be in charge of a major construction project? And spending money locally on supplies for that project?"

Peter saw his point. He began to get excited. With the engineer actually coming to town, he would be able to interview Mickliewiecz without spending Bill's precious money on long distance calls. And, since he had the chamber

president on the phone, this was the perfect moment to get a local angle on the project. He pumped Romeo for information and found out that the parks service had already given permission for the construction, that the work was being funded by some Toronto interests which owned the Maligne Lake resort, and by a local group which ran the ferry service across Medicine Lake in the summer. Peter decided to see if he could work some controversy into the issue.

"How do you feel about Mr. Mickliewiecz's pronouncements that he will bring Jasper, kicking and screaming, into the nineteen-fifties?" he asked bluntly. He was momentarily pleased with his own cleverness, but he couldn't faze the mortician.

"If he can take us into the nineteen-sixties, or the seventies, so much the better!" the chamber president declared. "Jasper needs more of that kind of positive thinking. This dam is going to mean jobs, lots of jobs, and new investment. It's a real opportunity for this town, and we should get behind it."

Standard chamber of commerce flack, Peter thought as he wrote it down. Still, it would make a nice little story.

"Thanks, Romeo" he said and began to slide the phone off his shoulder.

"Hey, wait a minute! Don't you want to know what I think - off the record?"

Peter was curious. Whatever Romeo's story was, it had to be better than the official version.

"Yeah, why not?"

"Promise it's off the record?"

"Yes!" He wondered then what could be so important.

"Cross my heart and hope to die."

"Great. I can use the business. As president of the chamber, I think the Polack will liven things up. As president, I think that's wonderful. As undertaker to the people of Jasper, I can't stand the guy."

"How come?"

"He's gonna liven things up! Do I need this aggravation? He's gonna put me out of business! Listen, things have been pretty dead around here for years, and that's just the way I like it. Who needs Mickliewiecz? That stiff! Hey, there's a thought. I can use the money. Oh, and by the way, if you should happen to drop dead, give us a call. We're in the book."

Peter decided he had underestimated Romeo.

On Wednesday the tenth, the paper came out with his story on Delta. Peter had kept the article as innocuous as his journalist's conscience allowed, but he was still worried he might unintentionally say something hurtful. He told himself he was relieved when the doctor kept her promise and didn't join the regular parade of critics. (The lady with the English accent wanted him to write "petrol,"

not "gasoline.")

On his way home that evening he walked past the clinic. The lights were out, and the building looked dark and chill. Peter turned up his collar to ward off the cold and made his way slowly towards warmth, light, and Mrs. McNeil's Wednesday night meatloaf.

It was even colder at the cenotaph on Remembrance Day. The frigid temperatures had driven the Mounties to put on buffalo coats over their scarlet tunics, and Peter was envying them the warmth even while he trained his camera on Sgt. Jack McGillivray. Just as he released the shutter, someone bumped his arm, ruining the shot. He turned and saw a tall man with amused brown eyes and regular features. His camel hair coat probably cost more than Peter's monthly salary.

"I'm sorry," said the brown-eyed man. "I hope I didn't wreck your picture. Used to take them myself," he added, indicating Peter's camera, " -- when I was young and foolish."

"Oh, I see you two have met." Delta's interruption made Peter bite back the answer he wanted to make to Camel Hair Coat.

"Not formally," said Peter.

Delta shivered in a gust of icy wind, and the other man put his arm around her.

"Julius Steele, this is Peter Slater, newspaper

reporter. Peter Slater, Julius Steele. We work together at the clinic," she explained to Peter.

The two men shook hands briefly. Steele had to take his arm from Delta's shoulders to extend his hand, Peter was pleased to see. His enjoyment didn't last long.

"So you're the fellow who got our Delta into so much trouble at the hospital," Julius said lightly. "Some of the nurses were upset by your story on Delta."

"What happened?" Peter asked, raking his memory to come up with anything controversial from the article.

Delta slapped Julius's shoulder with a familiarity that Peter envied. "You weren't supposed to say anything about it!" She turned to Peter.

"It was nothing, really. A couple of the ladies were snippy with me because," and she rolled her eyes, "and I quote, 'I was pleasantly surprised by the level of professionalism displayed by the staff at the Jasper hospital'."

The paragraph jumped into Peter's mind: third from the bottom of sixteen column inches.

"That upset them?" He honestly couldn't see how it would.

Steele was only too willing to explain.

"Seems they interpreted it as an insult." Peter wished he wouldn't sound so damned amused.

Delta tried to shrug off the incident.

"Oh, they're just sensitive about working in a small town. They all figure big city types look down on them, even though they have the same training. I told them it was nonsense. They'll come around." The confidence in Delta's voice was belied by the concern in her eyes.

"Listen, I'm sorry -- " Peter began.

Steele interrupted as if he hadn't spoken. "I told her to tell everyone she'd been misquoted. She said she couldn't do that to you, but I told her you were a professional and wouldn't mind. You don't, do you?"

"No, of course not." Peter spoke as politely as he could with his teeth clenched. He turned directly to Delta. "You go right ahead and tell them it was my mistake," he told her. "If it will help, tell them to call me on Wednesday."

"That's sweet of you," Delta said and smiled at him. Peter found himself six inches closer to her with no memory of having moved. He just had the chance to notice how soft her eyes were when an ill-timed eddy of wind whipped powder snow into Delta's face. She twisted to avoid it, and Steele saw his chance.

"We'd better find some shelter from this wind," he said, almost dragging her off. "Nice to meet you, Slater, " he called over his shoulder. And nicer to leave me, Peter thought.

When Stanislaus Mickliewiecz presented his wreath he

reminded Peter of a heron stalking its prey. A tall, gaunt man with a slight stoop, his Legion beret stuck out behind his narrow skull like the fringe of feathers at the back of the bird's head. When he walked to the cenotaph, his long, thin legs bent exaggeratedly at the knees. Peter figured he could be no less than six and a half feet tall. Even without standing up straight, he still towered over the rest of the crowd. Romeo would need an oversize coffin for this one, he decided.

After the ceremony, in the Royal Canadian Legion just across the street from the cenotaph, Peter first heard the tall man's voice. It was low, intimate, and carried surprisingly well in the shoulder to shoulder crowd.

" -- After dinner, Monty said to me, 'Mr. Mickliewiecz, your idea may just shorten this war. Would you care for a Cuban cigar and some of this excellent port?' - it was a fino, the '09, not their best --," the engineer was holding forth to a group in a corner when a red-faced man interrupted him.

"Yer a bloody liar! Monty didn't bloody smoke or bloody drink and he didn't let his bloody officers!"

Mickliewiecz smiled gently and leaned down towards the shorter man. It emphasized his height, as the other had to crane his neck noticeably to meet the engineer's gaze.

"Of course not," Mickliewiecz said. "It was a test he used on everyone. If you forgot yourself and accepted

either offer, the evening was over. I refused, naturally, and we had a game of billiards instead. A very satisfying evening, although I must tell you that as a general" - pause - "he was not a very good billiards player."

"You won?" a voice asked.

"Well, yes," Mickliewiecz said modestly. " 'Sir,' he said to me, 'You've an engineer's eye for a straight line. Some of my colleagues on the general staff could learn from you, sir.' It was very flattering."

The red-faced man got perceptibly redder and stomped off, muttering. Peter was at the outer edges of the circle around the engineer, and when he started to edge inward, he banged someone's elbow with his camera.

"Sorry!" he said immediately, before he noticed that his victim was the round-faced joker from the train station.

"Why, it's Mr. No-Cars-in-Jasper!" Peter said. "Maybe I'm not sorry after all."

The Indian held up his hands in surrender.

"Hey, it was just a joke. Boy, if I'd known you were gonna get violent, I wouldn't have said anything. Of course, I'd be a lot happier if there weren't any cars in Jasper, but I'm a lousy driver." Then his round face broke into an infectious grin. "We sure had you going that night!"

Peter smiled back.

"No harm done," he relented. "Not to me, anyway. You all right?"

"Yeah, fine." The native held out his hand, then clutched theatrically at his elbow. "God, ya broke it! Good thing us Injuns is tough. Willie Manybears."

"I'm Peter Slater." They shook hands.

"You're the reporter?"

"Yeah."

"You can put that camera down in the cloak room. Or do you like banging people's elbows?"

"I'm trying to do an interview."

"In the bar?" Willie raised his eyebrows.

"Why not?" Peter shrugged. "I've got to do it sometime. Might as well get it out of the way."

"Better you than me," the Indian said. "Who's it with?"

Peter pointed with his chin. "Mr. Mickliewiecz."

"Oh, him." Willie's words carried a wealth of undertones. "What's he doing in Jasper anyway?"

Peter thought everybody in town knew about the dam project. He filled Willie in on the details.

"Mess up Medicine Lake?" Manybears asked. "He's asking for trouble."

The reporter in Peter was roused. "Why? Is there some opposition to the dam?"

"If there isn't, there will be," Willie said. He

stared across the room. "Mickliewiecz," he said, half to himself. "I don't know about that."

"Have you met him?" Peter asked. "What's he like?"

Manybears shook his head. "I haven't met him. But he sent me on a boat ride once."

"A boat ride?" Peter wanted to hear this.

"All expenses paid, me and my squad, floating down the Po River."

"Sounds nice. The Po River? In Italy?" Peter asked.

"Yeah, Italy in the winter," Willie answered. "It's a triple-treat: rain, American C-rations, and German gunners." Willie took a sip from his glass.

"So what happened?" Peter prompted.

Willie ducked his head. "Are you sure you want to hear another war story?"

"Do I have a choice?" Peter indicated the beret-wearing legionaries, who were talking almost loud enough to drown out the chorus of "Wavy Navy" blasting out of the record player.

"Okay," said Willie. "Don't say I didn't warn you." He hesitated and took a quick swallow of his drink. "Ginger ale. I can't touch the other stuff. You're sure?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Come on." Peter's curiosity was piqued.

"Italy in winter," Willie said, the beginnings of a smile on his face. "I've never seen so much rain in my

life. The river was really high and we're supposed to cross it upstream of the fighting, on a pontoon bridge. The captain thought the bridge was straining at its moorings, but when he calls the RCE, their liaison engineer says it's okay to cross. Safe! Koo, boy."

"Somebody screwed up?" Peter asked.

Willie looked across the room and grinned. "You could say that." He turned to Peter again. "We get halfway across and the moorings give. Everybody grabs something or somebody and away we go. Worse, we're supposed to be part of a flanking movement and we float right into the combat area. Not only are we hanging on for dear life, the boys at German artillery decide it might be fun to do a little shtonk. There we are, spinning down the river at what feels like a hundred miles an hour, the Krauts are tossing Screaming Meemies and eighty-eights at us, and, honest to God, I'm getting seasick, when my lieutenant has to open his mouth. Lieutenant Jonathan Haftley. Jesus." He shook his head. "We're in a combat area, shells going off left and right, boom-splash, boom-splaaash, and the machine guns are starting to find the range, and he decides this is the place to try his leadership skills. 'Manybears,' he yells 'you're an Indian, can't you steer this thing to shore?' I'm having enough trouble hanging on to the bridge and my breakfast at the same time, so I yell back, 'No, sir! This time we are truly up the Po without a paddle!'"

"But you got out okay?" Peter asked.

"Nah, we all got drowned. Yeah, some of the Princess Pats heard we were coming and got a line across the river."

"Shit, Manybears, not that Po River boat ride story again." A drunk in a Legion beret pushed his way between them and spoke to Peter. "Every year he tells somebody that story. Just because they gave him the damned M.M." He turned with mock belligerence to Willie. "You're the biggest goddam liar I ever met." He patted Willie on the cheek. "If you weren't so cute, we'd have to kick you out."

The drunk clutched at Peter's sleeve. "Don't believe a word Manybears says. He's a terrible liar. Really. Could you lend me five dollars for a drink? Someone got me drunk and stole all my money!"

Willie and Peter left him happily ensconced at the bar with a beer before Peter remembered he hadn't heard about Mickliewiecz's role in Willie's adventure. "Was Stanislaus the engineer who said the bridge was safe?"

"That's him," Willie said. "Later found out that the Eyeties had warned him about how high the river could get, but he'd ignored them. Said they didn't know anything."

"Are you still mad at him?"

"Mad at him?" Willie seemed genuinely surprised. "What for? That little boat ride was the most fun I had during the whole war! I wouldn't mind doing it again some day." He paused. "Mind you, I'd rather do it without the artillery.

That made it a little too exciting."

"Better you than me," Peter said. He noticed the group around Mickliewiecz was thinning out. "This looks like my chance. See you around, Willie."

"Excuse me, Mr. Mickliewiecz?" Peter introduced himself.

"You're the reporter? At last!" Mickliewiecz exclaimed with gratifying warmth. "I've heard a lot about you. Call me Stan."

They found a quiet corner and Peter pulled out his notebook, only to discover Stan stooped over him, his face only inches away. The reporter found himself leaning slightly backwards, until the back of his head touched the wall behind him. Uneasy at being crowded, his first question wasn't the one he had intended to ask.

"One of the guys here tells me he was on one of your bridges. In Italy." Now why did I say that, he wondered.

"Oh? Who said so?" Stan raised his head slightly to scan the crowd. Peter was reminded of the heron scanning a pond for frogs.

Well, it was out in the open now. And he hadn't told Stan what Willie had said about the bridge, so he figured it couldn't hurt.

"Willie Manybears. The big Indian over there."

Stan stopped searching and nodded. His voice dropped to a conspiratorial murmur, strangely audible even over the

roar of conversation in the bar.

"Oh, yes. Manydeers."

"You mean Manybears?"

"Yes, of course, Manybears," Stan agreed. "I've heard from the local police that he gets into a lot of trouble. Some grudge against whites."

Peter was astonished to hear it and he told the engineer. But the tall, gaunt man only looked puzzled.

"Could the police be wrong, do you think?" he asked Peter, who didn't know what to think. Stan's next comment reminded him of another important topic.

"You wanted to interview me about Medicine Lake?" Stan asked.

"Yeah, if I could," said Peter, beginning to think he might get some work out of the way. Stan dashed his hopes.

"Certainly. I'll come by your office tomorrow at two," the engineer said.

Peter didn't want to wait. He gestured with his notepad, hopeful that the engineer would change his mind.

"I thought perhaps since we're both here -- "

"Good, you've got your notebook out," Stan said.

"There were a number of minor inaccuracies in your article on me in last week's paper. I thought you might like help to set the record straight. I'm sure you're as anxious to correct your mistakes as I am." Peter was still trying to figure that one out when Stan moved on. "Just a few

misquotes, that's all. They're causing some concern here in town, and that doesn't do anybody any good, does it?" The engineer had an infuriating look of genial tolerance on his face.

He leaned in closer. "I certainly never said anything derogatory about Jasper. I don't know how that reporter in Moose Jaw could have misinterpreted me so badly. But you know what kind of a backward town it is. You should have called me. I would have been glad to answer your questions."

Peter opened his mouth to explain about his publisher's attitude towards long-distance bills, but Stan cut him off.

"I'm sure it's difficult to keep up high standards in a place like this. I do understand, believe me."

It was a small grain of comfort, which Peter was prepared to accept when the other shoe dropped.

"I'm sure you won't mind if I have a look at your corrections before you print. Have them ready when I come in tomorrow, would you?" Stan pulled away for a second, then leaned back in, trapping Peter again. "Oh, yes, and I'll expect to see a copy of the interview with me before you print it. To avoid any further . . . misunderstandings?"

Jamming the notebook back into his pocket, Peter made a vow. Stanislaus Mickliewicz, he told himself, would get

to approve his stories on the same day the devil played hockey in hell.

If there was one thing that bothered Peter, it was having some amateur look over his shoulder while he worked. Fortunately, he told himself, there was no risk of Bill letting the engineer do what he wanted. And he continued to think that for the next twelve hours.

"Of course you can check the story before we print it, Stan." Peter winced at the words.

He had reckoned without his publisher. Bill Tollstrup had smelled money when Stan walked in the door Friday, and all Peter's protests were waved aside.

"Hell, it's only one little story," said Peter's boss. "No big deal." He and Stan sat at their ease in the two chairs in the publisher's office. Peter was left standing.

"Maybe Gordie Howe can play on my team," he muttered.

"You say something?" Bill asked sharply.

"I don't see how we're going to pay for his time," Peter replied.

"Oh, I'll do it for free," the tall engineer assured him.

"There, isn't that great?" Bill's enthusiasm was beginning to get on Peter's nerves. "You should be happy to have such an expert copyeditor."

The reporter clenched his teeth to keep his joy from showing, but Bill was still speaking.

"One more thing before you go." Peter had not been aware he had been going anywhere. "In future, please try and check your sources more thoroughly. You should have followed up that Moose Jaw story. It only would have taken a couple of telephone calls."

Peter's jaw dropped. "But --," he began.

"That's all right, don't apologise," Bill interrupted quickly, turning to Stan and adding in a voice full of tolerance and understanding, "These young people - always trying to save a dollar."

That afternoon the publisher took Peter out for coffee, a gesture of apology that an impoverished reporter had to accept. At the Sunrise Cafe, Bill told him that in spring he and Mickliewiecz would take a trail ride out to Medicine Lake.

"It's only a half-hour drive," Peter said. "I thought you were both busy men."

"Never too busy to get out and enjoy nature on a weekend. Besides, Stan thought it might be a good idea to get the lay of the land that way. We can do a little fishing, drink a little rye, have a good time." Bill winked. "I'll do a story on it, and the paper'll pick up the tab. A nice, paid, tax-deductible vacation."

He seemed to be expecting a comment. "Nice work if you can get it," Peter supplied. Personally, he thought he'd rather spend a weekend darning socks. Bill chuckled and

waved one hand expansively.

"Some day, my boy, all of this could be yours," he said.

Peter signaled the waitress for more coffee. Anything to avoid looking Bill in the eye at that moment. If having a newspaper meant cosyng up to people like Stan, he didn't want one.

Chapter 5

On that November 12th, spring had seemed improbably far away, and Peter gave no more thought to Bill's planned junket with Stan. Winter was a busy time in Jasper. The town had come into its own as a ski resort after the Second World War, and its popularity was still increasing. Skiers came in droves, and the pace of life picked up. Peter had his hands full just keeping up with the local news. Then, as if he didn't have enough to do, he casually mentioned at a chamber luncheon that he had been a member of his university drama club. That was all the opening Romeo Slipchuk needed, and Peter found himself the stage manager for the Jasper Little Theatre production of Hamlet. The chamber president himself had been the natural choice for producer. Directing, he explained, didn't give him enough scope. "Or a chance to keep an eye on the box office receipts."

"Culture! That's what this town needs," the mortician declared. "Culture! Shakespeare reeks of culture. Of course, I'd rather give the people Taras Shevchenko, but you've got to do what sells."

"Taras who?" Peter asked.

Romeo rolled his eyes. "Barbarians. I have to work with barbarians!"

The play took almost all Peter's spare time. He called

Delta at least once a week, but either her telephone was busy or she was. He did see her around town, often with Julius Steele, who seemed to be getting taller, better looking, and better dressed each time. People were beginning to talk about them as a couple. Just watching the two of them together gave Peter the strangest sensation of pressure at the back of his throat. One day, he mentioned it to Bill, who nodded wisely, "Yeah, those winter colds are buggers, aren't they?"

Peter hadn't even known he was sick.

Hamlet was a great success, at least as nearly as Peter could tell from behind the curtain. Three hundred people attended the two performances at the high school. About four hundred of those stayed for the closing night party, which prompted Romeo's remark that there were "more fans in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. Or at the box office."

Unable to get Delta on the telephone, Peter had to resort to dropping off a ticket for her at the clinic, along with an invitation to the party. He didn't see her that night, though. He did see Julius Steele, who came over to him while he was scanning the crowd for Delta.

"I just wanted to thank you for the ticket," Steele said.

"What ticket?" Peter wondered what the doctor was talking about.

"The one you gave to Delta. She couldn't make it - had a difficult child birth to handle - so she let me have it." Steele then told Peter what a wonderful theatre reviewer he had been for his student paper. He credited his own success to his natural powers of observation before congratulating Peter on his performance.

"But I wasn't on stage," Peter said, bewildered.

"Don't be so modest," Steele reproved him. "You were just fine out there. A little hard to hear, perhaps, but not bad, for an amateur."

Talk of the Medicine Lake dam began to pick up again as the days lengthened. At a noon meeting of the Rotary Club in March, Peter was introduced to Judge Pennifold, head of the group of Jasper businessmen who were funding the project. Pennifold was to be the speaker at the luncheon. He was a puffy-faced man with a high forehead and a shock of curly white hair, who reminded Peter of a dandelion gone to seed. He told the reporter that he had retired from the bench years before to pursue his business interests. He saw the dam as a boon to Jasper, and that's what he said to the Rotarians.

"It'll mean more tourists and more jobs," he told the club. "Why, with any luck, we can turn Maligne Lake into another Jasper. The whole area will benefit. That's what progress is all about."

He concluded his speech to enthusiastic applause, and

Peter didn't give the matter a second thought. He wrote a story on the judge's views, and it appeared in the next paper. He was surprised when two letters came in from people who were opposed to the dam project.

"I thought nearly everybody liked the dam," he told Willie Manybears one day at coffee in the Sunrise. The place was crowded, and Willie was sharing Peter's table.

"Everybody's got an opinion," the native said. "I don't think it's such a hot idea myself."

"How come?" Peter asked.

Willie shook his head. "I don't know. Just a gut feeling." Bill arrived at that moment with the latest news from the NHL, and talk of the Stanley Cup took over.

The end of the winter came almost as a surprise. One morning Peter looked up to discover Bill cursing his income tax. Water was melting its own paths through the packed snow on the streets, and people walked around with their parkas open at the neck. Within days, it seemed, the snow climbed out of the valleys to perch on the high peaks, and the skiers departed.

In early May, Peter ran into Willie outside the IGA. As they stood in the sun talking, Willie broke off to peer at Peter's cheek.

"Spring must be here," he said.

"How can you tell? See the first robin?" Peter asked.

"Almost," said Willie, reaching up and lightly

slapping Peter, who was so startled he couldn't move. The round-faced man reached out and delicately removed something from Peter's cheek. "First mosquito."

The mountain air tasted more alive than anything Peter had ever noticed before. Something about the extra warmth of the sun and the sight of the new leaves budding on the trees put a bounce in his step. The people he passed on the street seemed friendlier, less hurried. Over the shock of tax time, even Bill got caught up in the season and celebrated by giving Peter a raise and a promotion to editor.

That day, in a mild state of euphoria, Peter walked over to the grocery store for the stew meat Mrs. McNeil had asked him to get. At the meat counter, his good fortune continued.

"Hey, Delta! Hi!" It seemed like a month since he had last seen her. Surreptitiously, he checked up and down the aisle. No Julius Steele. He was relieved.

"Peter! How are you? I'd begun to think you were hibernating."

"No, just run off my feet with work and the play. Work and play, in fact. Sorry, bad pun." He could have kicked himself. Why did he make these stupid remarks? "How about you?"

"Just about the same. Ski season," the doctor rolled her blue eyes. "If I never see another schusser with a

broken leg, it'll be too soon!"

Peter laughed and she went on.

"Oh, and I've been wanting to tell you how sorry I am about missing the play."

"Babies can be so inconsiderate," Peter agreed. "How'd it go?"

"Great," Delta said. "She had twins. But I still wish I could have come to Hamlet. I'll bet it was wonderful."

"It would have been better if we hadn't left out an entire scene the first night and if our Hamlet hadn't almost forgotten to die the second time," he said.

"Pish!" Peter didn't know anyone still used that expression. It suited Delta somehow. "Did anybody in the audience notice?" she asked.

"No, not one of them!" And he told her of Steele's praise for his acting.

"That man can be such an idiot," Delta said with surprising heat. "Did you know people have started rumors that he and I are going together?"

Peter's heart beat faster.

"You're kidding!" he said with as much surprise as he could muster. He hoped he could be forgiven for white lies. "I wonder how that started."

Delta shrugged.

"I suppose it's only natural. Two doctors, working together. It just drives me crazy that anybody would think

I'd fall for a guy like him." She leaned toward him and lowered her voice. "He's so boring! Can you imagine being married to him?"

Peter managed to shake his head.

"God, no!"

Their giggles were interrupted by the return of the butcher with the stewing beef. Peter took it from him reluctantly.

"Well, I'd better get this back to my landlady." He didn't really want to leave.

"Right," Delta said. "And I'd better get some groceries, or there'll be nothing to eat tonight."

"Yeah."

"See you sometime."

"I'd like that. Babies allowing, of course."

"Naturally."

Peter was in line at the checkout counter before he remembered that he hadn't told Delta the good news about his promotion. He turned to look for her. His search must have taken longer than he thought because he was suddenly jolted out of it by a harsh voice.

"Are you gonna stand there all day, or are you gonna pay for that?" it asked. Looking down, Peter discovered the voice came from the rotund woman named Rosy who had caused Jack McGillivray and his constable such grief.

"Huh?" He was still thinking about Delta. Rosy

gestured towards the till with a can of beans.

"The lady's waitin' for you," she said impatiently.
"You wanna buy that or not?"

Peter realized he had been blocking the line for a couple of minutes now.

"Sorry, I was just . . . , " he began.

Rosy folded her arms across the expanse of her chest and waited.

"Why don't you go ahead?" he finished weakly, stepping aside. As he walked back up the aisle, he heard Rosy snort, "Spring fever!"

He caught up with Delta next to a display of California oranges.

"Hey, I didn't mention my good news." He told her about his promotion.

"Oh, Peter, that's wonderful! Congratulations!" There was real pleasure in her voice, and her blue eyes shone up at him in a way that made his breath come short. "You deserve it. I think you're a terrific writer. And so does my dad."

"Your dad?" Peter was thoroughly pleased, if a trifle confused.

"Yes, I've been sending him copies of the paper. He says you're very good."

An irrational desire to keep Delta happy came over Peter. He realized he even wanted her father to like his

stories.

"Bless his good taste!" he said as lightly as he could. "Would his daughter like to help me celebrate my well-deserved promotion? Like with a picnic on Saturday?"

If he spoke a little too quickly, Peter decided, it was better than slowing down and having his voice break.

Delta's smile became even broader. He wouldn't have thought that possible. It struck him how pleasant it was to be wrong sometimes.

"Why, I'd love to, Mr. Editor. I'll fry the chicken if you'll buy the wine."

"You don't have to cook," he protested.

She stopped him with a gesture. "It's the least I can do to help you celebrate."

Peter wouldn't have argued with her for money.

"Pick you up Saturday? About 11?"

"I'll tell all the babies to stay put until Sunday," she affirmed.

Quietly singing "Kalamazoo," Peter walked home with the stew meat. Even when Jack McGillivray went by in his patrol car and gave him a professionally suspicious look, he did not stop. He just flapped the packet of stew meat cheerily in the sergeant's direction and concentrated on reaching the high notes.

It was much too good to last. The blow fell Friday afternoon when his publisher summoned him into the office.

"Peter! Get in here. Good news!" Bill said. Peter perked up.

"Another raise?" The paper could afford it and, Lord knows, he could spend it.

His boss was taken aback by the suggestion. "What? Don't be greedy," he said. "Something almost as good, though."

"I'm game. What is it?" Overwhelmed by a sense of well-being, Peter could not see what was coming.

Bill was all smiles. "How would you like an all-expense paid weekend vacation, courtesy of the Jasper Journal?"

"Sounds terrific, when do I leave?" Perhaps the Journal was going to send him to Edmonton to cover the opening of the provincial legislature. Peter had been asking Bill about that for a month now. But he couldn't figure out how that would be a vacation.

"Tomorrow morning!" Bill announced triumphantly.

"Tomorrow?" A large fist seized hold of Peter's stomach. "But --"

His publisher interrupted. "I'm supposed to go up to Medicine Lake this weekend with Stan Mickliewiecz. Remember?"

Peter had completely forgotten about their camping trip. What did that have to do with him, he wondered.

"So?" he asked.

"I can't go this weekend, so you'll have to go for me. After all, I've promised Stan a trip, and I always keep my promises."

Peter asked what Bill's promises had to do with him.

The publisher looked surprised.

"I've sold ad space to go with a Medicine Lake story. Somebody's got to write that story, and you're my reporter. Who else should go? Arnie?"

"Why don't you go? It was your idea!" Peter floundered, trying to find a way out.

"Yeah, but Margaret needs some work done around the house this weekend." Peter had never seen Bill's wife, Margaret. She hadn't even come to the little staff Christmas party where Elsie, relaxed after three cups of potent eggnogg, had confided that Margaret phoned Bill at least twice a day. "I think she just sits inside watching the neighbors," she had confided. "Lace curtains, you know. She can see out but they can't see in." And now the near-mythical Margaret had emerged to throw a spanner into the works.

"You just don't want to go, do you?" he said accusingly. "You just don't want to have to spend a whole weekend with Stan the Man."

"Nope. That's not it. It's spring cleaning." Bill ignored the skeptical look Peter gave him and plowed on. "Margaret needs me to take down the storm windows and put

up the screens. Says it has to be this weekend, or else! You know what women are like once they get a crazy idea in their heads."

Yes, Peter thought bitterly, a perfect excuse for men who want to get out of doing something nasty. He had one last arrow in his quiver.

"But I've got a date to take Delta on a picnic tomorrow." As he said it, Peter realised how feeble his protest sounded.

"You can picnic anytime." Bill blithely swept aside Peter's weekend. "This trail ride is all paid for, and you have to go. Take warm clothes; it gets cold out there at night. Make sure you've got your camera. I want lots of pictures of the site and the scenery. Try and get a couple of interviews out of Stan, and we'll use one as a sidebar, you know, a feature on the project and then a nice bit on his impression of the mountains, the grandeur of the Rockies, that sort of thing. It'll be great, just great!"

If it's so terrific, why aren't you going, Peter thought mulishly.

"I'm sorry about your picnic, but this takes priority. Hell, you'll probably have fun." Bill chuckled again, then laughed. "Where else could you get a job that paid you to go off and relax in the mountains? I'm even supplying a guide, so you don't have to cook or set up a tent. Great, huh?"

Peter kept his mouth shut. What he had to say at that moment would not have been good for his career.

"Okay, that's settled," Bill said cheerfully, taking silence for consent. "You go and have a terrific time, and I'll see you on Monday." Peter was moving slowly to the door when Bill's voice brought him back.

"Oh, hey, I forgot to mention. It's a long ride so you'll have to be at Fletcher's stable by 5 a.m. How about that! You'll see a spring day dawn in the mountains!"

"Whoopee," said Peter.

Chapter 6

Peter could not get through to Delta at the clinic all day and had to call her at home after work. Listening to her telephone ring, he fervently hoped she wouldn't answer it; naturally, she did.

"Sixfivethreeseven," she said in a cheery voice.

He took a deep breath. "Delta, hi! It's Peter."

"Hi! I've just started to cook the chicken."

Damn, he thought, I hate this. "Oh," he said, feeling hopelessly inadequate. "I'm sorry to hear that, because I won't be able to eat it."

"Oh, no," she said. "Why not?"

"Bill stuck me with an assignment."

"Couldn't we go after you're done?" Delta asked.

"Um, I don't think so," Peter said, as his heart sank. He explained to her about the trail ride.

"Three guys going camping while your newspaper pays for it? Sounds more like a vacation than an assignment," she said when he finished. Peter realized she was right. It did sound like a vacation.

"I hate camping," he said.

"Then I guess I can take a rain check," she said.

"I'd like that a lot," Peter told her. "Some other weekend?"

"All right," Delta agreed, her voice crackling

slightly on the line. "But next time you keep your promise. I don't burn chicken for just anyone."

When he hung up, Peter sat at his desk for several minutes, looking at the telephone receiver and feeling lousy. The only sound in the empty office was the ticking of the clock. It suited his mood. But then he sighed, and stood up, and went home. After all, he had to get up at four a.m.

Next morning, depressed, bleary-eyed, and chilled, he reached the stables at ten minutes after five to be met by a very annoyed Stan Mickliewiecz. The cold, gray predawn was not warmed by the engineer's greeting.

"You're late." Stan was standing beside a trio of tethered saddle horses.

Peter thought the engineer was damned lucky he was there at all. He would have said it out loud, but at that time of the morning he didn't have the energy. He did manage a meaningful glare, but it just bounced off the tall man, who wasn't finished. He spoke quietly.

"Bill said you might be late and that I was to inform him if you were." Peter was too stunned by this remark to wonder why Bill would say such things. "You've made a habit of this sort of behavior, and it might someday cost you your job. You'd better buck up if you want to stay employed. Just some friendly advice."

He stalked across the dimly lit stable yard and

disappeared into the office. Peter just stood, staring dully after him, pondering the stupidity of his career choice. Other men had jobs where they got weekends off and could spend time with women who wanted to celebrate their promotions. But he had to be smart and be a journalist and have his weekends ruined by idiots like Stan.

"How can I be late?" He called after the engineer. "I'm always at work before Bill is!" There was no response. "You know, I could start to dislike that man," he muttered to the horse in the stall beside him.

"Our friend Stan? Nah, he's a sweetie," it replied.

Peter jumped and stared. Then Willie Manybears' moonface appeared over the stall door. "G' morning."

Now quite wide awake, Peter managed to mumble "Morning." Willie waved a hoof pick in the direction Stan had taken.

"Don't mind him. He's not used to getting up early."

"You mean people get used to this?" Peter asked sourly.

"Not you, too?" Willie was amused. "I can see you two are gonna be fun today."

"You're going to be our guide?" It would be nice to have one friendly face along.

"Nah, I just come down here at this time of morning for the sheer joy of it. What's your excuse?"

"I was ordered to," and Peter explained about Bill

backing out of the expedition.

"I thought you'd jump at the chance," Willie said.

"Nice trail ride, terrific native guide, what more could you want?"

"A date with Delta Mackenzie." Peter told Willie about the picnic.

"You had to cancel on that cute redhead? Ouch, that hurts," the guide said sympathetically.

Stan's cold voice broke in.

"Whenever you two are quite finished discussing your love lives," the engineer said, "we can get started. The sooner we get this nonsense over with, the better."

"I thought you wanted to do this," Peter said. That was certainly the impression Bill had given him.

Stan sighed and rolled his eyes up to heaven. He didn't bother to look at Peter when he spoke.

"I agreed to make this damn' fool trip to please your publisher, Slater. I was humoring him. He thought it was important for me to 'absorb the atmosphere.' As I didn't wish to upset the local business community, I agreed to go along. As a result, I am voluntarily taking two days to do something I could do by car in an hour. It's because I'm a nice guy. Now, let's go." He turned and stalked, bird-like, towards the saddle horses. Peter half-expected him to spread his wings.

"Cheer up," Willie murmured, opening the stable door

and leading out the horse. "Maybe we'll get lucky and the lake spirits will get him."

"Spirits?" Peter asked quietly, keeping a wary eye on Stan.

Willie looked uncomfortable and busied himself saddling the horse. "It's nothing," he said. "Forget I mentioned it. We'd better get going." And he refused to say any more.

The pommel, Peter decided in a calm, rational manner, was an excellent invention. This coffee break was the first chance he had had to study it from ground level, as he leaned against his horse and clutched it with both hands. Sturdy, convenient, well-made, and capable of bearing a man's weight, it was an outstanding step forward in saddle design. It fit so neatly into his palm, he wondered if palm and pommel were not related in some linguistic manner. Perhaps "pommel" had originally meant something like "what you hold in the palm of your hand while riding" or -- Willie interrupted his etymological musings.

"You're gonna have to let go of that thing sometime if you want coffee," the guide said.

"I'd love a cup," Peter said. "But there's a little problem here."

"Which is?" Willie asked politely.

"Which is if I let go of this pommel, I'm going to

crumple like a load of wet laundry," Peter explained. Riding, he had discovered, did odd things to his knees, turning what had shortly before been sturdy bone and cartilage into pudding. He had noticed this phenomenon the instant his feet had touched the ground, as his knees had simply refused to function, leaving him dangling helplessly from his own saddle. He could tell from the look on his mare's face that she was unimpressed. Great, he thought, now even horses feel superior to me.

"Legs a little funny, huh?" Willie chuckled.

"Funny?" Peter considered the idea, using the pommel to pull himself into a slightly more erect posture. "No, I don't think funny is exactly the word I'd use."

"You should have kicked your feet out of the stirrups every few minutes. Otherwise you just beat hell out of your knees," the guide said.

Peter couldn't believe his ears.

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" he demanded.

Willie seemed surprised. "How was I supposed to know you'd never ridden a horse before? You never said anything."

"Because I've never ridden a horse before and I didn't know I was supposed to!" Peter shouted in despair.

"Well, now you know," Willie said. "Guess I'd better get you settled. If you keep hanging on like that, Annabelle there is liable to get a sore neck."

"Thanks for the sympathy," Peter muttered as Willie assisted him over to the fire pit and eased him onto a folded horse blanket. It hurt. Stan was already off his horse and showing no signs of discomfort, much to Peter's envy. The tall engineer pulled a pair of expensive-looking binoculars and a topographical map out of his saddlebags and took a notebook out of his pocket. "I'm going ahead to make some notes on the valley," he called. "Maps," and he shook the one in his hand, "are made for mapmakers, not engineers." He disappeared around the curve in the trail which rose above their resting place.

A great reporter, Peter thought, would follow him in spite of the pain. He started to get up but the stabbing sensations in his legs changed his mind. On the other hand, perhaps what a great reporter should do is stay here and admire the scenery. He rolled gently onto his side and had a look around.

It was, he had to admit, pretty damned spectacular. They had been climbing steadily since leaving Jasper, following a narrow ridge which ran northeast and southwest. They had reached a small flat area which Willie said was often used as a rest stop. In the foreground, the horses nibbled at the sparse mountain vegetation, while Willie set a coffee pot on a Coleman stove. To Peter's left the sun had just cleared the distant northeast horizon and floated in a pale blue sky over the white and gray of the mountain

tops and black-green of the pine forests. In some of the valleys and sheltered areas lower down, a mist of emerald tinged with gold showed where the deciduous trees had started to leaf.

Peter could see for miles across the mountains and the valleys. In spite of his knees, for a few minutes he was glad he had come. He lost himself in the scenery until the aroma of fresh coffee brought him back. Willie handed him a cup, then settled himself on another blanket and looked around appreciatively.

"Our own sunrise cafe, huh? What do you think?"

"Not bad. Not bad at all."

The thinness of the high air spread a hush completely different from anything Peter had ever experienced in the lowlands or the city. Over the aroma of coffee, a pine-scented breeze reached his nostrils. For the first time, he thought he understood why someone like Willie would want to spend his life like this, surrounded by nature. His reverie was interrupted by Stan's return from the wilderness.

"Toilet paper?" he asked Willie.

"Annabelle's saddlebags," replied the guide, pointing to Peter's mare.

The engineer rummaged briefly, yanked out a roll, and disappeared back down the trail. Peter snorted.

"And I thought he was off making great scientific

observations," he said.

Willie smiled up at the sky and took a sip of coffee.

"Guess he was overwhelmed," he said, "by the call of the wild."

It was afternoon when Willie turned them off the main trail onto a narrow path leading sharply down towards the northeast. Below them was a small lake which glowed turquoise in the afternoon sun.

"There she is," he said. "Medicine Lake."

"Not as big as I expected," Stan said, rising in his stirrups for a better look. Slumped in misery on Annabelle's back, Peter could see it well enough. All he really cared about was how much longer he had to endure. He asked the guide.

"Another hour or two," Willie told him. "You'll make it."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Peter said.

The nearness of the lake and the warmth of the afternoon lifted even his spirits as they descended through the pines. Stan, too, seemed to feel a change and began to talk about what he planned to do when they arrived.

"While you two set up camp, I'll ride over and check out the instruments my men set up last week."

"Instruments?" Willie asked.

"Of course," said Stan. "I need good numbers to come up with a decent engineering solution: rates of flow into

and out of the lake, how much the water rises or falls in a set time. Give me facts and figures, gentlemen, and I can move the world!"

The tall man waxed lyrical about the measuring instruments. It was a side of Stan that Peter hadn't seen before.

"The finest meters in the world," stan assured the others. "Swiss-engineered movements, specially hardened alloys, water-proofed leather cases. They are examples of truly fine design, form and function melding together. They are beautiful, just beautiful." The reporter thought he really ought to be writing all of this down, but he was too busy using both hands to lift himself and his saddle sores clear of Annabelle's broad back.

"Those things were in leather cases, Stan?" Willie asked.

"That's right," the engineer replied. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said the Indian. "Just that the mountains can be tough on that sort of thing. Especially in the spring."

"That's why I chose waterproof leather," Stan explained, as if speaking to a child. "Rain, snow, sleet, frost - nothing will harm those babies. Spring!" he snorted. "Not even a mountain winter can hurt them."

"Oh, sometimes it's not winter that's tough around here, it's spring," Willie replied.

"Like today?" Stan asked, amused. "All this destructive sunshine and warmth? That'll ruin steel in a real hurry."

Willie shrugged. "Yeah. Guess you're right."

Finally, they emerged from the trees into a clearing on the shore of Medicine Lake. Stan and Willie had their horses tethered to convenient trees before either noticed that the third member of the group was still astride the patient Annabelle.

"You okay, Pete?" Willie asked.

The editor put his hands on the saddle horn and shifted his weight carefully.

"Have you ever seen Red River?" he said in as casual a voice as he could manage.

Peter was surprised that Stan answered.

"Of course. John Wayne and Montgomery Clift. Not one of Howard Hawks' best, but it wasn't his fault. I heard that Clift is a pervert of some sort."

Peter let that pass.

"You know that final scene where father and son shoot each other?"

"Sure." Stan shrugged.

"When I first saw that movie," Peter said, shifting his weight onto the left stirrup with a groan, "I thought it was terrible - ouch," he added as he eased his right foot from the stirrup, "how father and son would let their

differences grow to - oh, God," he said, lying flat on Annabelle's neck to swing his leg painfully across her back, "oh boy, that hurts - grow to the point where they have to fight to settle their - Jesus Christ!" as he slid to the ground his feet, clinging desperately to the saddle, " - differences." He wrenched himself around to face the others.

"Now I know that after two months on one of these monsters, shooting the other guy was a true act of love. After all, they were just trying - ooooooh my God," he said, letting go of the saddle to thump buttocks-first into the ground with an impact that made the others wince, "aaaa - to put the other poor bastard out of his misery!"

Annabelle craned her neck around curiously and snuffled down the back of Peter's neck.

"Would one of you move this horse," he said plaintively, "before she decides to eat me?"

Chapter 7

Two hours later, Peter was lying on his side on a blanket, soothing petroleum jelly rubbed on the huge chafe marks which scored his inner thighs. Two more wool blankets were pulled well up over him, and he was starting to feel almost human again.

"I never understood why you white guys called first time riders tenderfeet. I'll bet that's the only part of you that doesn't hurt," Willie said, holding out a mug of steaming brown liquid. "Drink this."

Peter regarded the substance with profound suspicion.

"What is it?"

"Heap good Injun medicine, white eyes. Willow bark boiled in lake water."

"Boiled bark?" Peter's stomach churned at the thought.

"Well, it would probably be better for you than this stuff, which is just tea with rum and sugar. And since I didn't think you were up to willow bark, how about a couple of Aspirin?" Willie opened his other hand to reveal two little white pills.

"Come to papa!" With the tablets halfway to his mouth, Peter paused. "Hey, thanks."

"Drink up, man. You'll feel better."

It struck Peter as damned good advice, and he followed it as quickly as he could. Within a few minutes, alcohol,

caffeine, sugar, and acetylsalicylic acid had done their work, and he was finally able to get a good look at their campsite. They were on the south side of the lake which ran east and west, with a gentle curve like the slenderest of crescent moons. He could see the ferry berthed at a landing stage at the eastern end, waiting for the return of the bus from the Maligne Lake resort. Beyond the dock, a white ribbon of what was probably gravel road disappeared into the pines. All the way around the lake, the trees stopped several yards from the water's edge, and the ground between the water line and the forest was littered with huge slabs of rock. One exception was a house-sized boulder about a mile to the south which bore an uncanny resemblance to a hawk-nosed human face.

Willie had brought them out on a mossy slope which led down to the water's edge. It was one of the few places Peter could see where the rocks had not taken over. Just below him, where the water lapped against the shore, Stan squatted, scooping up water in one hand and holding it up to his face before touching it reverently to his lips. Then the engineer strode over to the cook stove and poured himself a cup of tea before coming over to Peter.

"Feeling better?" Stan asked.

"Yeah, thanks."

Stan leaned closer and lowered his voice. Peter recognised the posture and resigned himself to what was

coming.

"You know, it was foolish to try a trail ride this long if you've never been on a horse before. I don't know why you didn't let Bill come."

Peter surrendered. There was no point in even trying to explain. "I don't know what came over me, Stan. Temporary insanity, I guess." Inspiration struck. "I swear it will never happen again." That, he thought, will be one easy promise to keep.

Apparently satisfied, Stan changed the topic.

"How much local knowledge do you have?"

"Local knowledge? Some about Jasper but not much about this place. Why?"

Stan frowned. "I wonder why this is called Medicine Lake. I checked as well as I can without proper scientific instruments" - Peter would not exactly have called sniffing and tasting "checking" - "but there's no trace of hydrogen sulfide."

"Hydrogen sulfide?" Willie joined in from beside a tangle of poles, cords, and canvas that he swore could be turned into a tent.

"Of course. The gas that makes that rotten egg smell." Stan was at his most mellow-voiced and self-assured. "Natural source sulfur hot springs. Like Bath in England, or Spa in Belgium, or even Baden-Baden in Germany."

"Like Banff or Radium Hot Springs?" Peter suggested.

Stan frowned. "Yes, there are similarities," he granted, finally. "But this water," gesturing at the lake, "has no apparent signs of a sulfur source." Willie had turned all his attention to a knotted guy rope.

The engineer smiled. "Medicine Lake, huh? Somebody goofed. Maybe they should have called it -- Mistake Lake!" He barked with laughter at his own joke. Peter saw Willie glance up at the engineer with unreadable eyes, then quickly out at the lake. Peter craned his neck to see what Willie had spotted on the water but there was nothing visible.

Stan drained his tea. "Well, I'm off to the west end to see the flow meters." He looked at his watch. "I'll be back by about six. What time's dinner?"

Willie checked the angle of the sun. "Two, three hours."

"Good. Don't start without me." The engineer climbed back on his horse and rode west through the trees.

Peter lay on his blanket, watching Willie wrestle the mass of canvas into a tent. When it was finally up, he came over and joined the reporter.

"How do you like Medicine Lake so far?" Willie asked.

"Better than Annabelle's back," Peter said. "Of course, that's not saying much. But this is a pretty spot. I didn't expect all these rocks." He waved a hand at the stone fields.

"A gift from the glaciers," Willie said. "See that one down there?" He pointed to the boulder Peter had noticed earlier. "People around here like to call that the Indian's Head."

Peter looked back and forth between the craggy, hook-nosed face on the rock and Willie's round cheeks, snub nose, and soft brown eyes. "Yeah, there's a real resemblance. Two stone faces together."

The guide laughed. "You're the only one who's ever thought so," he said.

"Is there some kind of Indian legend or something about it?" Peter asked, his reporter's curiosity aroused.

"Not that I know," Willie shrugged. "It's just a big rock."

They sat in silence, watching the light of the setting sun mature from yellow to soft gold, as it filtered through the branches of the western trees. The breeze which had blown for most of the day died with the coming of evening and the lake was still, the mirror of its surface reflecting the stern peaks of the Queen Elizabeth range on the other side of the valley. Clouds floated through the sky, glowing in the sunlight, suspended above their images in the still water below. A daytime, full moon rose serenely in the east.

Finally, about the time Willie started making dinner -

beans, bread, and fried Spam - Stan returned. He silently walked his horse up into the camp and dismounted. Peter and the guide exchanged a look.

"So, Stan, how was all the Swiss machinery running? Like clockwork?" the reporter ventured.

The engineer slowly undid a buckle on the cinch strap of his saddle. Peter thought perhaps he hadn't heard.

"How were the flow meters?"

"I heard you the first time!" Stan shouted, giving the strap a vicious yank that set his horse prancing. "I'm not deaf!" He lifted the saddle off and threw it to the ground.

"The goddamn flow meters," he said with fury, "have been eaten."

"Eaten?"

"Yes, you idiot, eaten!" Stan visibly controlled himself. He removed the saddle blanket from his horse's back and began folding it neatly. "They have been eaten by a bear. So, three thousand dollars worth of Swiss engineering has been shredded by some mangy grizzly, and this whole stupid trail ride," his voice rose, "has been a complete bloody waste of my time!" He threw the blanket into the woods. Willie calmly watched his equipment flying into the trees.

"Bears, huh?" he said, apparently unsurprised. "I wondered about that."

"How could you wonder about that, ManyBEARS?" Stan

said, heavily sarcastic. "Was it a relative of yours?"

"Could be." Willie met the engineer's glare steadily. "A bear in the spring'll eat just about anything. And they like leather." He shrugged. "I tried to tell you on the trail."

"Well, it wouldn't have done much good if you had, would it?" the tall man said. "So why don't you just cook dinner and keep quiet so I can do some thinking? All right?"

Peter lay in embarrassed silence as Stan grabbed up his saddle bags and went into the tent. Willie put a lid on the frying pan, picked up his brushes, and began to groom the engineer's horse. From inside the tent came a metallic snapping sound, followed by an unmistakable gurgling. Stan's thought processes apparently required some liquid assistance. He stuck his head through the tent flap.

"Call me when dinner's ready," he said directly to Peter, then disappeared like a turtle hiding in its shell.

No one spoke during the meal. The engineer emerged from the tent long enough to get his food, then went back inside. Willie propped himself against a rock and ate slowly. Peter, on the other hand, found that he had quite an appetite. He wolfed down the fried Spam as the birds sang, Willie stared at nothing, and Stan's bottle gurgled.

By the time twilight settled into the valley, and Willie was washing the dishes, Peter had had all the

silence he could take.

"What kind of medicine is there about this place, Willie?" he asked. "Some Indian thing?"

"It's nothing," said the guide. "Just stories."

"Stories are my business," Peter reminded him. "Why don't you want to talk about it?"

Willie tilted his head. "I dunno. No real reason why not, I guess." He picked up a rag and sat down on a saddle. "You sure you want to hear this?"

"Sure," said Peter.

"Yeah. Well. It's just what the local guys say about it." Willie wiped his hands with the rag. "They say the reason there's no river running out of this lake is because powerful spirits live under it. They drain the water, and they must be very strong because they take so much. That's the medicine here. It's Indian medicine. Kind of like magic. But kind of like church, too. It's a part of the old ways, from before the white man."

Genuinely curious, Peter asked, "Do you believe in the spirits?"

"Not really," Willie shrugged, then laughed. "Well, maybe a little. I guess it's a bit like Father Lefebvre at the church. Mostly I don't believe what he says. But when he's doing communion, I get down there and take it anyway. It's like I can't help believing it when I'm there." And he added thoughtfully, sweeping the lake with his eyes, "The

same way I feel here."

"Church and spirits, huh?" There was no mistaking the scorn in Stan's voice, as he staggered out of the tent. Peter had hoped he had fallen asleep. "You sound just like my parents. Go to mass, Stanislaus, and pray for your immortal soul. Oh, and leave out the milk for the czarodziejka, the fairies, so they won't curse us. Well, I told them they could leave that crap in the old country and so can you!"

If Peter's legs hadn't been so sore, he might not have snapped at the engineer the way he did.

"Stan, for Christ's sake, no more." That was a mistake, he realized as soon as he said it.

"For Christ's sake, no more? For Christ's sake, yes more! Lots more, sonny boy." Stan stood up very straight and blessed the campfire with the rye bottle. "In the name of the father, the sonny boy, and the holy spirit water." He giggled. "Spirit water! Boy, could I swim in a lake of this stuff. This is what you call white man's medicine," he explained to Willie, holding out the bottle. Willie didn't bother to look up, even when Stan prodded him forcefully on the shoulder. Discouraged, Stan staggered back to address the campfire.

"Here," he declaimed "is proof of our technological superiority." He had considerable trouble pronouncing the last two words as he tipped the bottle and poured the last

ounce of rye onto the fire. Flames leaped up almost to his face and he jumped back, clumsily. "Maybe even overproof."

"It is the water which is fire!" He gestured dramatically and fell over. He hauled himself unsteadily to his feet, clutching the miraculously unbroken bottle to his chest.

"All gone," he said mournfully. "A dead soldier." He swayed from side to side.

"I know," he said suddenly. "We'll bury it at sea!" As he turned toward the lake, Willie rose to a half crouch, but Stan ran down to the edge of the water. He brought the bottle back behind his head. For a single frozen instant he stood there, moonlight silvering his back and shoulders like some Greek statue. His long arm whipped forward, and the bottle sailed out over the water. Peter could see it clearly in the light of the full moon, lazily turning over and over, glinting above the mirror-still surface of the lake, flying above its own reflection, sailing among the stars mirrored in the water. Then the bottle landed on its own image, and shattered it into ripples, and disappeared into it.

"Splaaash!" shouted Stan, throwing his hands up dramatically. "Take that, O Great Spirit! Go ahead! Turn me into a frog!" He turned calmly back towards the camp. "There, Willie. See? Nothing happened. No evil spirits, no great Indian gods. Nothing at all. It's all just a load of

crap." Then he threw back his head and howled like a wolf.

"C'mon, spirits! Catch me if you can!" Stan started running east along the shore. "You call yourselves evil spirits? Come out and fight me like a man!"

"Jesus Christ!" Willie said in disgust. "C'mon, we'd better get him before he trips and breaks his goddamned neck. Or turns into a frog."

"We? Not with these legs," Peter protested.

"Yeah, you!" Peter had never seen him angry before. "Your paper wanted him out here, so you're responsible for him. I'm just the lousy guide, remember? Only it'll make quite a story if he falls in and drowns before that dam gets built. Up!" Willie started off down the lake without a backwards glance.

Cursing the engineer for an idiot, Peter managed to get his shoes on and hobble gamely after Willie. Saddle sores came to painful life again as he limped along the shore, following the sound of the engineer's shouting.

Fortunately, Stan hadn't gone too far. He was standing on a large, flat rock which jutted out into the lake. Willie was about twenty yards away walking slowly towards him.

"C'mon off there, Stan," Willie called. "You're a bit pissed."

"A bit pissed? A BIT pissed?" Stan asked incredulously. "I am, my good fellow, totally pissed. Which

reminds me." And he pulled down his zipper. "Here's a libation to the spirits!"

"Damn," Willie said and climbed up onto the rock as Stan's kidneys worked off some of their burden.

"Waters are made by fools like me, but only God can make a pee," the engineer sang, turning from side to side to get maximum distribution over the lake's surface. Helplessly, Peter watched as Willie reached out and put a restraining hand on Stan's arm. Oh, no, he thought, as the engineer allowed Willie to swing him right around.

Peter could see the two men facing each other, and then the silence was broken by spattering sounds.

Stan giggled. Willie was looking down. "Oops," said the engineer. "First time I've ever peed somebody else's pants!"

Considering how drunk Stan was, Peter was amazed by his quickness. When Willie shoved him, he actually managed to spread his arms out like a gaunt bird taking flight before he hit the water.

Camp was a very quiet place the next morning. When Peter woke up and painfully pulled himself from his sleeping bag, he found Willie, fully dressed, sitting outside the tent. Behind him, the horses were already saddled.

"Coffee's ready," the guide said. He indicated the pot on the campstove. "I'm taking the horses back by myself.

I'll send a truck for you. Should be here this afternoon. There's bacon and eggs, bread and jam in the grub bag." He pointed. "I stuck it up in that tree last night."

Inwardly, Peter cursed Bill and his stupid ideas. There was a tight, unpleasant feeling in his stomach which matched the rigidly impassive look on Willie's face as he waited for a reply.

"We'll be all right," Peter supplied.

"Yeah." Willie swung himself into the saddle. "When that engineer of yours wakes up, tell him I said he's a drunk and a fool." He stopped. "And that only a moron insults another man's beliefs. Or maybe a prophet. And he ain't no prophet."

Peter watched Willie lead the other horses up the trail when a sudden feeling of relief washed over him. At least he wouldn't have to get back on Annabelle again. At that moment the little mare lifted her tail in salute and left a pile of horsey forget-me-nots.

"Same to you," he muttered after her.

About two hours later, Stan dragged himself out into the fresh air and winced at the sunlight.

"Water?" he croaked. He even sounds like a heron, Peter thought.

"Just under that boulder there." Peter pointed to the spring upslope from the camp. Stan staggered towards it. Peter was surprised that anything that green could move at

all. A quarter of an hour later the engineer made his slow way back, black hair dripping and plastered to his skull, looking more heron-like than ever. Peter half-expected to see him stalking frogs in the shallows next.

"Coffee?"

The reporter was impressed. Most of the croak had gone. Stan sounded almost human. He waved at the pot.

Stan nodded his thanks before filling his cup and draining it. Must be the hangover, Peter decided. It would take at least twenty ounces of booze to let a man swallow boiling coffee that fast.

Stan took a second cup more slowly, then returned to the stream for another life-giving soak. This time, when he returned, there was color in his face.

"The redskin ran out on us?" he asked with some trace of his old condescension. He was feeling better, Peter decided. Too bad, really.

"Willie," he emphasized, "left this morning." A little white lie seemed in order. "He said he thought you might need the sleep, and he had to leave to clear the trail before dark."

Stan shrugged disdainfully.

"I should have known he'd cut out. Probably mad because we didn't leave any booze for him. No firewater fer the Injun. You know what they're like."

Men who live in glass bottles, Peter decided, would be

wiser not to throw the first stone. A wicked thought crossed his mind.

"Can I get you some breakfast, Stan?" he asked innocently. "Willie left us some food. I could fry up some nice fatty bacon or a couple of eggs in butter. You like them nice and runny in the middle? Or maybe scrambled in grease?"

The look of disdain disappeared from Stan's face. Peter pretended not to notice and rummaged in the food bag.

"No, wait a minute. My mistake. We don't have any butter, just this oleomargarine stuff." He took the waxed paper packet out and waved the bright orange lump under Stan's nose. "I don't know how I could have mistaken it for butter. Just look at it, will ya? With this dye in it, you can spot it a mile off. Still, it greases up the food and that's the main thing, isn't it? Anything to help the stuff slip down the old gullet."

Stan was turning distinctly paler. He gulped once before mumbling, "No, that's okay, I'm fine."

"Toast, that's what we need," said Peter relentlessly. "I could fry up some bread, instead, I guess. How about that, Stan, fried bread with lots of margarine? Too greasy, do you think?" he called after the engineer, who had discovered an urgent need to run into the woods.

Peter hummed to himself as he began laying slices of bacon in the frying pan. If those retching noises were any

indication, Stan was going to have lots of room for a really hearty breakfast. And Peter meant to see that he got one.

By mid-afternoon, Stan was recovered enough and bored enough to do the interview Bill had requested. "It's why I came out here. Let's get it over with," he said grimly. Peter managed to get some pictures of him looking out over the lake, although Stan refused to pose on the flat rock he had visited the night before.

A pickup truck came for them about six o'clock. The driver, a short, thick man who said little, took down the tent, stowed their gear with easy efficiency, and had them back in Jasper by seven. He let Stan off at his hotel first.

"I'll want to see that story when you're done," the engineer said tersely to Peter before he went in, leaning into the cab to make his point. "Call me when it's ready. And if I see any funny stuff in it, you'd better watch out for your job, mister!"

He stalked into the lobby.

"Thanks, Stan," Peter called after him. Then, as the door swung shut behind him. "You're a real prince!"

Then his silent driver spoke.

"Prince? Spelled p-r-i-c-k?"

Caught off guard, Peter laughed. "Yeah. Spelled just like that."

"It was," Peter concluded to Bill over coffee on Monday morning, "one of the all time lousy weekends, and if you ever stick me with something like that again, I'm going to be out of here as fast as my legs can carry me."

"Which isn't," he added between clenched teeth as he made a first effort to pull himself to his feet, "too damned fast right now. Ow," he added, dropping abruptly back into his chair.

Bill had grace enough to look abashed. "I'm sorry, Peter, I truly am. I had no idea it would be that bad." Peter noticed he had the grace to look guilty. "Any chance I could have the story by noon?"

Peter looked at him in scorn. "Of course. I know the deadline. I am an adult and a professional, you know. I am the product of a million years of evolution, and I think I can deal with a little stiffness and a few saddle sores." His knuckles whitened with effort, and he rose to a semi-crouch.

"You could do me a small favor, though," he said, thoughtfully, as his arms began to shake with the effort of holding himself up.

"You've earned one," Bill conceded. "What is it?"

"Help me stand up straight, will you?"

"Sure." Between the two of them, they levered Peter more-or-less erect. "Anything else?" Bill asked.

Peter didn't even have to think about it. "Pray for a slow news week," he said.

Chapter 8

"So much for the power of prayer," Peter said, looking at the list on his desk.

He had taken Monday afternoon off to recuperate before the evening council meeting. Bill had not only agreed to his request for time off but had offered some assistance as well.

"You go rest up. You've earned it," the publisher had said. Peter thought he had earned a month's paid holiday but he didn't press his luck. Bill continued, "In fact, I'll even set up a couple of interviews for you. How's that?"

Peter had been grateful at the time. But when he had hobbled in Tuesday morning, reality struck. Hurricane Tollstrup had been hard at work. With dismay, he read the note from his boss:

Peter,

Here's your schedule for today. I thought keeping busy might keep your mind off what ails you.

Bill

Noon. Arrival of dam construction gang and equipment, CNR depot.

2 p.m. Jasper Townsite Land Rights Option Exchange, 411 Patricia. See Romeo.

7 p.m. Committee to Preserve Jasper's
Natural Beauty, Elks Hall.

8:30 p.m. Jasper Committee in Favor of
Free Enterprise, Legion.

When Bill came smiling through the door, Peter was waiting for him.

"What is this?" he demanded, waving the note at his boss.

Bill grinned. "Pretty good, huh? Want me to set up the rest of the week for you?"

Peter thought that was a horrible idea. "What are you trying to do? Run me into the ground? Bill, my legs are still killing me. I'm so sore I'd pay someone to go to the bathroom for me, so I wouldn't have to walk!"

Sympathy was not one of his employer's strong points.

"Oh, your legs aren't that bad," he declared. Peter wondered how the hell he knew, while Bill smiled the smile of one who is free from pain. "That schedule is just what you need. Work will take your mind off your legs. Last thing you need is to baby them. Get out and stretch them. Do you good."

What Peter muttered at his employer's back was not polite.

When the CNR special carrying Stan's work crew arrived, Peter was waiting for it, along with a number of

Jasper's citizens. Sitting on a baggage cart to rest his legs, Peter counted at least a dozen familiar faces including Rosy, the woman from the landfill site. She was chatting with his landlady, Mrs. McNeil. Arnie Sleeve and Elsie Fulcher were both there as well, having come across the street from the Journal offices. Peter slipped a photo plate in the heavy Speedgrafix camera and looked up to see Willie Manybears next to him.

"Don't any of these people have jobs?" Peter asked Willie.

"You mean like me?"

"You're self-employed. What about the rest of them?" he jerked his head at the crowd.

Willie shrugged. "It's lunch time. And, besides, it's not every day the circus comes to town." Then the passenger car doors opened, and the first of the invaders set foot on Jasper soil.

The dam crew wore their work clothes like uniforms, and they moved as purposefully as any military formation. The crowd had to give way when Stan's forces poured out of the day car to assemble in front of a large fleshy man with uncompromising blue jowls. Peter stopped taking pictures long enough to admire their restraint. They had managed to adapt well to life outside the army, he decided: not one of them actually snapped to attention in front of the foreman.

"I've never seen a civilian crew with spit-shined

workboots before," Peter murmured to Willie.

The guide took a careful look. "What makes you think you have now?" he replied.

There was more than a suspicion of a previous existence, too, about the equipment which came off the train. Boats which had been painted dazzle blue and silver were efficiently hoisted up by olive-drab cranes and set gently in cradles on trucks covered in camouflage patterns. One after another, crates of new wood sharply marked by clear black stencils were lifted off freight cars by forklifts and placed onto six-by-sixes. The legends were in many ways more interesting than the objects themselves: "compressor, air, mark three," "diving suit, one," and even "cook stove, mess tent, regimental."

Under a tarpaulin on the last flat car were the objects which drew Peter's interest. Under the canvas, they seemed to be cubes with rounded corners, and he could not figure out what they might be. As he left Willie to limp over and get a picture of them, a familiar voice sounded well above his left ear.

"You again?" it asked.

"It's my job, Stan," Peter replied. "So what's under the tarp?"

"If you ask me politely, I might tell you." The engineer smiled.

Peter took a deep breath.

"All right, Mr. Mickliewiecz, would you please tell me what is under the tarps?"

"Patience, my boy, and all will be revealed unto you," Stan replied. "We have to take the canvas off to unload them, and you'll see then. But it was good of you to ask so politely." Peter ground his teeth as the gaunt engineer stalked off to murmur a few words to the blue-chinned foreman, who nodded crisply before shouting, "Briggs! Stratton! Get that tarp off the rear car."

Relieved of their covering, the cubes seemed smaller and rounder, about the color of pine bark. Metal strapping ran tight lines around them but Peter could still read the stencils, "SANDBAGS. 1,000."

"All that for sandbags?" Peter asked.

The foreman heard his comment. "Sure. Have to keep the rain off them, don't we? Stands to reason." Then he was off to supervise the unloading of a large tank truck.

"So much for life's great mysteries," Willie said, appearing at his side. "I was wondering what those things were."

"If only they'd left the tarp on," Peter mused, "and moved the whole works out under cover of darkness. Then I'd have had a story: Stan stores secret surprise for . . . uh," he groped for further alliteration.

"Soviets?" Willie suggested.

"Yes! Soviets. Stan stores secret surprise for Soviets

with super security. Perfect."

"But not with bundles of empty burlap?"

"No." Peter sighed. "Damn. Nothing much I can do with that." He wished he could just go back to the office and sit down for the rest of the day.

He managed to grab a fried egg sandwich at the Sunrise before heading over to Patricia Street for his two'clock appointment. Romeo, a short, slim man with greying hair, was on the telephone when the reporter walked in.

"Hey, Peter! C'mon in," the mortician called. "Talk to you later, doctor," he said into the receiver, before hanging up with a flourish. "Welcome to the Jasper Townsite Land Rights Option Exchange!"

He waved his arm expansively to include three portable blackboards and two large legal maps of Jasper which were tacked to the wall.

The office was in what had been a vacant shop next to Romeo's funeral parlor. Furnishings were sparse. Romeo sat behind a table with folding legs, which held several clipboards and a couple of telephones. One rang.

Romeo waited for it to sound twice before tucking the receiver into his shoulder and grabbing a clipboard.

"Jasper Land Exchange. Yeah, Harry. Go ahead. That's 10 bid on lot 17, and an ask of 41 on lot 5, right? Anything else today? (Pause) Nope, I'll get those up the instant I hang up. (Pause) Yup. Open 'til three. Yeah, just

like New York." He hung up and grinned at Peter.

"The free market system. You gotta love it! Hear your legs are a little sore."

"News does travel fast around here, doesn't it?" Peter said. "You heard about my weekend, then?"

Romeo tapped the side of his nose. "Information is the lifeblood of commerce. What can I do for you today?"

"Let me sit down, then explain this, this thing." Peter gestured at the blackboards.

"The exchange?" Romeo asked. "It's simple. We're selling options on land rights on sites in the town. Some of us are gonna be ready for the boom when it hits."

Peter was bewildered.

"What boom?" he asked.

"The one we're going to have when Stan's project is a success," Romeo declared.

"But they haven't even started work yet," Peter protested.

Romeo was amused. "And if we sit around on our keisters waiting until they're finished, the big city sharks are gonna have everything sewn up. You have to move fast in business these days, Pete."

Peter hated being called Pete.

Romeo jumped up to indicate the town maps. "We've assigned every decent lot in town its own number, and each of the numbered lots is marked up here on the blackboards.

For a small membership fee - just to cover costs - any business man in town gets the right to make a preemptive bid on his choice of the lots."

Peter was confused. "But I thought all of the land was owned by the federal parks department. You can't buy or sell any land in Jasper, can you?"

Romeo chuckled. "Not now you can't but soon, soon. At the chamber, we're starting a petition to have the townsite turned over to private ownership. THEN, when that happens, we'll already own all the lease rights and have first crack at buying the land at fair market value. This place is a gold mine."

Peter looked around at the sparse furnishings. "Where do you keep the money?"

"Money?" Romeo was horrified. "We don't work with money here. This is real business. It's all on paper."

"If there's no money, how do people pay for land rights?" Peter decided he was definitely out of his depth here.

"Well, they can't actually pay for land rights," Romeo conceded. "It's illegal to sell anything which doesn't exist in law - yet. All anybody does here is say how much they would be willing to pay for a place if it becomes legal to sell it, in a hypothetical sort of way. That's why it's an options exchange."

Peter wanted to make sure he had this straight.

"So nobody's actually bought or sold anything?"

"Technically, no," Romeo admitted, then brightened up.

"But it's only a matter of time. Everybody in town is buying in. It's terrific." The second phone rang. "Here, look at this list of investors."

While Romeo made another deal, Peter read the list. It was a who's who of Jasper: half the townsite committee, bankers, businessmen -- he noted Julius Steele's name, and felt a spurt of jealousy. Doctors always have money for investments, he thought. That's why they made such good catches on the marriage market - unlike reporters. He forced himself to finish reading. One especially notable Jasper citizen was missing from the ranks of the option buyers.

"How come your name isn't on this list, Romeo?" he asked.

"It can't be," the little man said. "If the guy who runs the exchange is also in the market, how can you trust him?"

"That makes sense," Peter admitted. Something else occurred to him. "But you're the biggest wheeler-dealer in town. Aren't you upset at missing out on the action?"

Romeo sighed theatrically. "Yeah, I'm letting a great opportunity slip through my fingers. Wouldn't I love to get in there and scramble around? Hoo, boy. But somebody has to sacrifice himself for the good of the community - and

listen, in the long run, what's good for Jasper is good for me."

Peter thought that was odd. It didn't sound like Romeo at all.

"You mean you're just doing this for free, as community service?"

"Well, as a community service, yes. And it's nearly free," Romeo said. "I mean, there are expenses here, right? So, everytime somebody buys or sells, I get fifty cents, mainly to cover the labor and filing costs."

A nasty suspicion grew in Peter's mind.

"Is that in real money? Cash?"

"Or personal cheque."

"So, let me get this straight. These people pay to join the exchange - with real money -- "

"The telephone company won't take anything less," Romeo said, patting one of the phones.

". . . And they pay you real money for running the place?"

"Yup."

"And they can't actually buy anything yet?"

"Except an option on first refusal when we get the go-ahead," Romeo offered.

"And no money really changes hands? Except entry and transaction fees?" Peter was trying to keep the ideas straight.

"Kee-rect," Romeo said.

"So it's kind of like Monopoly?"

Romeo pursed his lips. "Yeah, that's basically the idea. Hell of a deal, ain't it? All the excitement of playing the exchanges and none of the financial risks."

As the phone rang again, Peter looked across the desk at the day's list of buy and sell orders in front of Romeo. He could see by the numbered lines that there were thirty on that page, and there were at least two sheets below it. Ninety times a half-dollar was forty-five dollars. Not bad money for answering telephones. He waved a goodbye to Romeo, who waved back without interrupting his conversation.

". . . Dr. Steele was calling about that one earlier today. Asking 19. All yours for 20, if you want it. Oh, and don't forget to bring your cheque for the transaction fees by the end of the week." Peter shook his head in admiration as he went. Some people, he thought, were born to make money.

That night, Peter was greeted at the door of the Elks hall by a tall woman with an impeccably upright carriage.

"Good evening, Mr. Slater. Welcome. I'm Helen Neville, Mrs. Percival Neville, chairwoman of the Committee to Preserve Jasper's Natural Beauty. We're glad you could come."

Helen Neville had an English accent which sounded

vaguely familiar. Peter was certain he had heard it before but there had been something different about the sound, and he couldn't think what it was. He didn't have a lot of time to speculate as Mrs. Neville, with a definite air of authority, took him firmly by the wrist. She led him towards a knot of women and introduced them in a blur of names.

"Would you care for some tea before we start?" Mrs. Neville asked him. Peter had a startling vision of what would happen if he slipped and accidentally called her by her first name. "Or I believe we can find some coffee. I cannot, however, guarantee its freshness."

Surprising himself, Peter asked for tea. Must be the accent, he mused.

About a dozen more people showed up for the meeting which started comfortably on time for Jasper: only about fifteen minutes late. Mrs. Neville started the proceedings by calling the meeting to order and making a short speech.

" . . . And we have a member of the local press present. Mr. Peter Slater has joined us from the Jasper Journal." She indicated him politely. Peter nodded at the audience, embarrassed. "I will extract an assurance from him that he will use proper syntax and spelling when he writes his report of our meeting. We are, after all, not Americans."

Oh, my God, thought Peter. It's her. It's Mrs. Queen's

English.

The Committee to Preserve Jasper's Natural Beauty, Peter gathered, had one main idea: to stop the damming of Medicine Lake. Mrs. Neville explained her reasons for starting the movement.

"My son loved to go up to that lake. He used to make us take him in the car in the fall when we'd all go down to the water and sit and listen to it draining. Just like Niagara Falls, he'd say. Now they're going ruin it to accommodate rude American tourists. I cannot see the need for it, and we are assembled to announce our opposition to such plans. We will begin by circulating a petition to be sent to Mr. Avery, our Member of Parliament, and insist that this project be stopped!" she finished to applause.

Opposing Stan? Peter wished them luck, although the Neville woman seemed a formidable sort. There was some doubt in his mind that Thaddeus Avery, M.P., was going to pay much attention to this group. He took notes of the proposals for stopping the project: direct appeal to the Warden, telegrams to the parks department, and finally, boycotting anyone who supported the project, or anyone whose husband supported the project. There was a touch of Lysistrata about that last one that Peter rather liked.

His conclusion about the beauty committee was that they were a bunch of old women who did not have enough to do. As if anybody was going to give a damn about Medicine

Lake, he thought. Not a chance.

He had to leave before the committee finished talking and Mrs. Neville made feel guilty about it.

"I'm sorry, but I have to go to another meeting," he explained when she admonished him from the chair.

"Nonsense," she said. "What could be more important than what we are discussing here tonight?"

"My publisher told me to go to both meetings." Peter decided to let Bill take responsibility for this one. "I'm only an employee. But you could call him tomorrow and tell him how you feel."

"I certainly will do precisely that," Mrs. Neville declared, and Peter almost smiled. "You may rest assured of it."

Peter whistled as he left the hall. Tomorrow would be one Wednesday when Bill dealt with Mrs. Neville. It made him smile just to think about it, and he arrived at the Legion in an upbeat mood. The Jasper Committee in Favor of Free Enterprise was meeting in the basement of the Legion building in a room that smelled of years of smoke and stale beer. Peter was greeted at the door by Judge Pennifold.

"Peter! Glad you could make it," the silver-haired businessman said. "Romeo asked me to keep an eye out for you. He said he thought you might want a beer, compliments of the committee?" He led Peter over to the pass-through window that did duty as a bar.

Peter was tempted but he was still working. "Maybe later."

"After's fine," said Pennifold. "If you're sure you won't change your mind?" He raised an eyebrow in inquiry.

"I'd better not," said Peter, patting the camera.

"I understand," said the judge. "But you don't mind if I do?"

"Help yourself," Peter assured him. "I just can't drink and take decent pictures."

Pennifold introduced him to the bartender, who turned out to be bald Phil from the railroad station. "It's my night off," he explained. "Anything to stay out of the house. Meet many bears yet?"

His remark about bears had to be explained to Pennifold, and Peter ended up having to tell the story of his first morning in Jasper to an amused group at the bar. Halfway through his tale, which was a lot funnier now that he could look back, it occurred to Peter that some of the men listening to him were married to women who had been at the beautification committee meeting. Must be interesting marriages, he decided.

At nine o'clock, Romeo arrived and called the meeting to order. There was some disappointment, since Phil had to shut the bar, but he promised to open it the instant the committee adjourned. The judge made sure Peter had a seat in the front row. The reporter took copious notes of the

discussion surrounding the only business of the evening (a motion to start a petition demanding that the government turn over the land within the townsite to private ownership). It passed easily. Romeo's disappointment that it did not go through unanimously was quickly settled when two dissenters in the corner explained that the meeting was obviously over, and all they were trying to do was get Phil's attention to open the bar again.

In the next hour, the bald man did a roaring business. Romeo bought Peter a beer. Then Judge Pennifold bought him a couple. Then Peter bought one or two for somebody else, just to be hospitable. In the end, it turned out to be one of the better meetings he had covered since coming to Jasper - as nearly as he could recall the next day. He did remember walking down Connaught Drive with Romeo, who took advantage of the deserted streets to stand on a park bench and deliver the Harfleur speech from Henry V.

"'Once more into the breach, dear friends,

Once more, or fill up the wall with our English
dead' Better it should be you English than us
Ukrainians -- "

Chapter 9

By Thursday Peter's legs had recovered. Then, to top off his week, he was able to get through to Delta on the telephone and make a date for Friday night. As they stood in line to see Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn in Roman Holiday, he told her about the arrival of the work crew.

"There were these huge squarish bundles piled up like some kind of Aztec pyramid and covered with a big tarp," he said, gesturing in the direction of a flock of sparrows foraging between the railroad tracks. The Beaver Theatre stood two doors down from the Journal offices, and across Connaught Street from the railyards.

"Right there, at the end of the train, like they were something special. What could they be? I asked myself. Some fantastic new piece of damming equipment, perhaps some marvel from the engineering world? What was the secret of the tarp?" Peter declaimed.

Delta giggled. "So? What was it?"

"Giant bundles of sandbags," he told her.

"Sandbags?"

"Empty sandbags."

"That's even less interesting than full sandbags,"

Delta said.

Peter agreed.

"Didn't you get down to see it at all? I thought

everybody in Jasper was here. The crowd was big enough," he said.

"Tuesday? I had a burst appendix, a whooping cough, and a hysterical mother who was convinced her kids had polio."

"Did they?" That was a news story he didn't want to cover.

"No, thank God, just colds. How are the legs, by the way?" Delta asked.

"Healed, I guess. Didn't do them much good climbing around trying to get pictures of shrouded sandbags, though," Peter said.

"I guess the trailride was the highlight of your week," she laughed.

Peter made a face but was interrupted before he could respond.

"Ah, but how could the highlight of his week be anything but the chance to stand here in this glamorous spot with you?" Doctor Julius Steele had come out of nowhere. With an Elizabethan sweep of his arm, he indicated the sidewalk on which Delta stood.

"Well, aren't you a gentleman?" Delta seemed pleased to see him. Peter could not work up the same enthusiasm.

"You bet. I'd rather spend time with you than with any old horse." His attention was focussed exclusively on Delta. Peter hadn't bargained on Steele showing up.

"Thank you. I think," said Delta. Steele took her hand and stepped back to survey his colleague with a glint in his eye. "Oh, yes, you're definitely better looking than most of the horses I've known."

"You jerk," Delta said in mock ferocity, miming a slap at Steele's face.

"You're right, I was out of line. You're better looking than every horse I've ever met! Ow!"

He rubbed his bicep where Delta's fist had landed. "Can I join you? I've wanted to see this movie ever since it came out."

This was addressed to Peter, who knew when he had been outmaneuvered.

"How can I say no?" he replied.

"Two escorts for the evening? I could get used to this." Delta's satisfaction was obvious. Peter hoped his disappointment was not. Maybe Gregory Peck would make up for it.

In case Mr. Peck didn't come through, Peter seized the chance when Steele went for popcorn and asked Delta if she was available to try the picnic again on Saturday.

"I'm supposed to go take pictures at Stan's camp on Saturday. Bill doesn't like me being idle, especially on my day off. So I thought maybe we could eat at Maligne Canyon on the way up, have a look at the site, and finish up with the boat trip down Maligne Lake."

She agreed with an enthusiasm that did funny things to his breathing, then added brightly, "I could even bring the fried chicken I have left from last week. Or did you want me to go to all the time and trouble of making fresh?"

"Fresh, please," Peter said. He knew a shot when he heard one and decided to be man enough to take it. "And I really am sorry, incredibly sorry about last weekend."

"All right, then I guess I won't insist on a trail ride," Delta said with a smile. When Steele returned they changed the subject by mutual, unspoken consent. Basking in the glow of his small triumph, Peter was prepared to put up with even Julius Steele, M.D., for this night.

The movie was about a man who so loves a woman of higher social standing that he gives her up to let her focus on her career. Delta was in tears at the final scene where Audrey Hepburn, as the princess, has to part from Gregory Peck, as the penniless reporter who is the true love of her life. Delta and Steele agreed over coffee afterwards that it was touchingly romantic.

Peter didn't care for it much.

He hoped the picnic would be better. At least Steele wouldn't be there. Out in the open air, mountain scenery, a boy and a girl, a little wine - it would be his big chance.

The picnic at Maligne Canyon was as good as he hoped it would be. There, the Maligne River had carved a deep, narrow channel through solid rock. Delta and Peter could

stand sixty feet above the roaring waters, and yet so close to the other side of the canyon it almost seemed that they could step across. Signs pointed out boreholes, now hanging twenty or thirty feet above the water, which had been drilled into the limestone by ancient whirlpools.

The sun cast deep green shadows among the firs where Peter and Delta had lunch. Peter was glad he had splurged and bought a bottle of French white wine for the occasion. Delta's eyes lit up when he produced the bottle.

"Pouilly-Fuisse! Oh, Peter," she said.

"Is that good?" He certainly hoped so. It had set him back four bucks at the liquor store.

"It's great," Delta said. "The authentic gout de terroir."

Peter's French was sketchy. "Sounds like baby food."

Delta laughed. "Gout de terroir," she pronounced carefully. "It means taste of the earth, which means it tastes flinty."

"You're pulling my leg," Peter said.

"Try it and see," she urged.

He did and discovered she was right. "Goo de terwarr," he said. "I'll have to remember that."

Perhaps it was the wine, or the scenery, or the company, or perhaps a combination of all three, but Peter found himself waxing poetic as they headed for Medicine Lake.

"That's really what I love about Jasper," he said, pointing out the car window as a bull elk, scruffy patches of its winter coat still clinging to it, strolled arrogantly off the road. "The animals accepting man, adapting and living with him. If we don't shoot them, they'll accept us. It's all part of the grandeur of nature."

The elk chose that instant to do what elks usually do in the woods. Peter could feel his ears burning.

Five miles later, Delta spotted additional elk sign.

"Look," she said merrily. "More grandeur."

Five minutes later, when they reached Medicine Lake, Peter was still suffering. They drove over a slight rise where a small granite shoulder had been blasted away to accommodate the highway and almost became a hood ornament for a monster six-by-six which came charging up the other side of the hill, taking up far more than its fair share of the road. Peter swerved right, then left on the slithery gravel and found himself suddenly in the middle of a construction project. He jammed on the brakes and slewed to a halt.

"I guess this must be the place," he said breathlessly as a bulldozer ground in front of them, belching clouds of diesel fumes. A hard-hat with a face attached appeared at Peter's open window. "You the reporter?" it asked, in a voice loud enough to be heard over the roar of the diesel.

"Yes!" Peter shouted. "Peter Slater!"

A clipboard appeared, and the eyes scanned it quickly. "Yeah, that's okay. Park over there. " An arm pointed to a gravelled area. "Report to the shack, and get your hard hats. Oh, yeah, and Mr. Mickliewiecz asked if you would please try and not get run over by the heavy equipment. He says it messes up the work schedule when we have to clean off the treads."

"We'll do our best," Peter replied.

Stan was nowhere to be found, so Peter and Delta fetched their hats from a bored-looking timekeeper before climbing up on a boulder to have a good look at the site. In spite of the coolness of their reception, Peter found himself admiring the enterprise and skill of the workers. They had only arrived on Tuesday and the camp was already looking civilized. Olive-green tents, showing distinct signs of wear, were laid out in orderly rows at one side. Just beyond them a small stream had been dammed with earth to make a pond right behind a large tent with a metal chimney. Cook tent, Peter guessed. On the other side of the pond were mounds of pine trees and brush, roots and tops sticking every which way: remains of the site-clearing. Their leaves and needles were still green, and Peter pointed them out to Delta.

"Darn, I wish I'd been here when they did that. It would have made a great shot. All those trees being ripped

up by bulldozers," he said, too busy looking through the viewfinder of his camera to worry about her lack of response.

On the other side of the camp was a long narrow tent whose purpose Peter could tell when the wind shifted.

"Whew, boy! Good thing that's downwind, so we get to breathe nice, clean exhaust fumes." He noticed that Delta didn't share his amusement.

"Yes," she said with a sour expression. "How fortunate. So much nicer than fresh air."

Peter shrugged. Women, he thought.

He forgot Delta's reaction as he took picture after picture. Out on the lake, men in boats were dumping white liquid into the lake. A passing worker told him it was to help the divers spot the cracks in the lake bottom. The action made for a nice shot, mountains behind the laborers, water in front. Then he saw one of the 'dozers knocking down several square yards of forest to clear a place for some fuel tanks. Peter couldn't get a plate in the camera fast enough to get the shot.

"Damn!" he said with feeling. "That always happens just at the wrong time."

"Oh, I'm sure they'd be willing to knock down a few extra trees for you, if you'd ask them politely," Delta said, her eyes narrowed. Peter perked up. It was worth asking. He found the lead hand.

"Why not?" the man said, after Peter had explained his problem. "Lots of trees around here." He called to the equipment operator. "Hey, Johnny, you're gonna be famous!"

To make sure Peter got a good shot, the bulldozer driver ripped up a couple of dozen scrubby pines. Their pointed tops heaved and fell in a spectacular jumble and one cooperative laborer climbed up on top of the mound to pose triumphantly for the camera.

"That's terrific!" Peter exclaimed to Delta. "Great white hunter stuff. Gives it a human dimension, too."

This was even better than he had hoped. He was surprised to turn around a moment later and find Delta had gone. Then he saw her coming out of the crew trailer without her hard hat. She walked across the site, ignoring the whistles from the workers, and climbed back into his car.

Peter went over to see what was the matter.

"Oh, there's nothing wrong," she told him in a voice that was a lie all by itself. "Whenever you're finished taking pictures of all this progress, I'd like to go back to town, please."

He asked why.

"All the noise and fumes from the machinery have given me a headache," Delta said, staring straight ahead.

Peter was suddenly angry. "We can go as soon as I finish," he said. He knew it sounded petty, but he couldn't

stop himself.

"Fine," she said. "I'll wait here."

Peter didn't hurry. An hour later he sauntered back to the car in his most casual manner to show how unimpressed he was with Delta. The slow walk over also helped hide the way his stomach churned. He wondered what had gone wrong.

The drive back to Jasper was silent. Delta did not speak to him until they stopped and he opened the car door for her.

"What was the name of that lady you said was running the campaign against the dam project?" she asked.

"Neville. Mrs. Percival Neville." Peter replied.

"Thinking of joining those old dingbats?"

"That, Mr. Slater, is my business. Thank you for a most informative day!"

She strode into the house while Peter looked on in combined admiration and consternation. She did have a great back view in slacks, he noticed with a sigh. He climbed back into the car and drove back to the paper. He had a sinking feeling that he had blown whatever chance he had had with her and the realization left a hollow feeling in his chest. He wondered if Delta ever spoke like that to Dr. Julius Steele. Somehow, he didn't think so.

Chapter 10

". . . Twenty-one thousand, one hundred and seventeen sandbags, containing an average of fifty pounds of sand per bag, or a total accumulated weight of sand in excess of one million pounds."

Stan was making his report to the Jasper chapter of the Rotary Club. The numbers were large, and even Peter, who had just endured a luncheon of lukewarm chicken noodle soup and cold roast beef on white bread with mayonnaise, had to admit that the engineer's achievement was impressive. In the eleven days since his disastrous picnic with Delta, the construction crew had been working like Trojans, sallying out from the shore with their boatloads of dam material, dumping in the white fluid by the barrelful, hardly stopping (it seemed) to eat or sleep. The mountains of sandbags had been reduced to molehills, and the ferry boats were being readied to take up to their moorings for the fast-approaching tourist season.

Excitement in the town was running high. Buoyed by news from the project site and fueled by the knowledge that the major tourist months of July and August were close, the business community was in a positively giddy mood. Anything seemed possible. Activity at the land option exchange had increased to the point where Romeo had had to hire an assistant to answer the phones. The option price on lot 15,

the prime location upon which the Jasper Journal building proudly stood, had risen from \$500 to \$5,000 dollars in ten days.

The Rotarians were buzzing with talk of deals and possibilities. "It's fabulous," Romeo proclaimed when Peter buttonholed him at the doorway of the meeting room where the undertaker stood with Judge Pennifold. "The phone is ringing off the hook. This man," he said, putting his arm around the judge, "deserves a lot of credit for what he's doing for Jasper. And he's helping me make a fortune."

"So why don't you hire someone to run the funeral parlor, too?" Peter teased.

Romeo frowned.

"When things began to heat up, I thought I'd have to get help in," he admitted. "But it's the darndest thing. With all the excitement, the home" (which Peter understood to mean mortuary) "just hasn't had any clients."

Pennifold's eyes lit up. "You might say his business has gone to hell in a handbasket!"

Peter managed to smile politely while the judge enjoyed his own humor. Then the ringing of the bell announced that the meeting had come to order.

As the featured speaker of the meeting, Stan was a hit. His glowing description of the progress of the project was exactly the sort of thing the men in the room had gathered to hear. For some of them, it was nothing short of

intoxicating. Through the entire speech, Pennifold beamed like a proud father.

Peter was present as Bill's guest, although he still had to take notes and pictures. When Stan finished, the publisher clouted Peter heartily on the shoulder.

"Damn!" Bill said in a low, emotional voice, almost drowned in the swell of conversation around them that was threatening to grow to a roar. "Twenty-five years I've been waiting for this, Pete. Twenty-five years! Hanging on by my fingernails through the Depression, fighting the shortages of the war, and do you know why?"

Having a feeling that the real answer had to do with making money, Peter sensibly said that he had no idea.

"Faith! That's why. Through all the bad times and the good, I never lost my faith that Jasper would become something special, and my newspaper would be there to see it happen!"

The publisher's eyes glistened with unshed tears. He gripped Peter's arm. "You write this one up real good, you hear?"

No, I think I'll just type up my usual pack of lies, Peter thought defensively. But he knew a command when he heard one.

"I'll do my best," he promised, crossing his fingers. But, he thought, I'm the one who will decide what best is.

Not everybody in town was pleased at the speed of

Stan's work crew. The week before, the Committee to Preserve Jasper's Natural Beauty had had a second meeting. Mrs. Neville, galvanized into action by the rapid progress of the construction, made sure that Peter came.

"We would so much appreciate your attendance," she informed the reluctant reporter. "Are you free Monday night?"

"Townsite committee meeting," Peter told her with relief.

"Perhaps Tuesday night?"

"Um, well," he stalled.

Mrs. Neville played her trump card. "Wednesday then? Knowing how busy you are, we voted unanimously to meet at any time convenient to you."

Peter gave in. "Tuesday night would be fine," he said.

"Please don't go to any extra trouble on our account," Mrs. Neville said.

"No trouble at all," Peter assured her. Not, he thought as he hung up, compared to the prospect of having to face the committee on a Wednesday night. Wednesday afternoons were bad enough, but the thought of having to face Helen Neville twice in one day was more than Peter could handle.

To his surprise, the meeting of the beauty preservation committee started on a positive note. He hadn't expected to see Delta there, but she greeted him at

the door with a warm smile which almost melted his knees. It made a great change from their last discussion.

"Peter, I'm so glad you could make it tonight." She took him by the arm and drew him into the Elks' Hall.

"If Mrs. Neville had told me you were going to be here, I would have said yes a lot faster," he admitted.

He was gazing with fascination into her eyes when the remembrance of their latest conversation struck him. He had to look away and take a deep breath to force out what he wanted to say next.

"Listen, I wanted to --," he began, just as Delta blurted, "Peter, I'm sorry --"

They laughed, and she gestured for him to proceed.

"I'm sorry about what happened that Saturday," Peter said. He had expected apologizing to be harder. "I should never have let myself get so wrapped up in a story that I left you sitting in the car. I was stupid."

"Oh, no!" Delta said with gratifying speed. "I was being silly. I knew you had a job to do before we went out. I didn't like what they were doing there, and I acted as if it was all your fault."

Peter was relieved to hear her talk that way.

"I'll forgive you, if you'll forgive me," he offered.

"Done," she said, and shook his hand to seal the bargain. "I've got to go help with the coffee. Talk to you later?" she added.

"You bet," said Peter. "Where are you sitting?"

"Up front," she called over her shoulder, heading for the kitchen.

Feeling warmly pleased, Peter spotted Delta's coat slung over a chair in the first row. Right in the middle, too, he noted happily. He could sit next to Delta, ask questions of the committee, and take their pictures, all without leaving his seat - or her side. What could be better?

He was concentrating on slipping a new bulb into the flashgun of his camera when he realized Delta was standing in front of him with somebody else. It was Julius Steele.

"Like a turtle coming out of its shell, don't you think?" Steele murmured as Peter looked up.

"Oh, hi." Peter said inadequately. Steele was the last person he had expected to see at this meeting. "What brings you here?"

"Delta persuaded me of the righteousness of the cause, and here I am - a true convert." To Peter's dismay, Steele picked up Delta's coat and held it on his lap as he sat down. "I'll look after this until you're done, Dr. Vice-Chairman," he said to her.

"Vice-chairman?" Peter could not keep the surprise out of his voice.

"Vice-chairwoman, actually. Why not?" Delta said with some coolness. "Don't you think I can do it?"

"Well, of course," Peter was taken aback. "I just never thought that anyone, er, that you, that is --"

"Would stand up for something I believe in?" There was a dangerous glint in Delta's eye. "Well, I don't like what your friend Mickliewiecz is doing up at Medicine Lake, and I intend to do something about it."

"He's not my friend!" he protested. He should have kept his mouth shut.

"It's not easy to tell that from reading your newspaper!" Delta retorted sharply, then recovered her composure. "Now if you will excuse me, I have something constructive to do, which I'm sure a PROFESSIONAL reporter will understand. It's called doing my job. Talk to you after, Julie."

She strode purposefully around the head table and took her seat at Helen Neville's side. Peter stared after her, blinking in astonishment. He tried to figure out when Steele had become Julie. What had brought about all that?

An objective observer of the meeting would have said its highlight was Julius Steele rising to his feet and announcing his conversion from the forces of evil, i.e., from a major trader on the land option exchange, to one of the good guys - a member of the committee.

"A national park is a national trust," he argued persuasively, speaking slowly and watching Peter's pen to make sure he wrote down every word which, in grim silence,

Peter did. He hated to admit it, but Steele's change in attitude was news.

"I believe we have a moral obligation to protect the heritage of our children from the depredations of those who would destroy in the name of progress!" Steele concluded to enthusiastic applause. Delta came from behind the head table to give him a warm hug. Peter had the feeling that the whole embrace was somehow aimed at him. A gauntlet had definitely been thrown - even if he wasn't quite sure by whom.

Peter knew his eyes were narrowed and his jaw was clenched, and he was determined to give as good as he got.

"Just a second, you two," he called to the doctors as they came out of their clinch.

The challenge was clear in Delta's face when she turned to him. Peter made himself smile. "I missed that hug the first time. Darn flash didn't work. How about doing it again for the camera?" That would teach her a lesson, he thought.

Delta didn't miss a beat.

"Sure," she said coolly. "Like this?"

The photograph turned out quite well. The camera caught clearly the startled look in Julius Steele's eyes when Delta kissed him. Too bad, Peter thought the next day as he sailed the print into the trash, that such sights weren't fit for a family newspaper.

Later, he went back and fished the picture out to place it in the files. "After all, you never know when a shot might be useful," he mused.

Bill came by and spotted the photo. He whistled.

"Yeah, like when those two become engaged. Good work, Pete."

"Gee, thanks," said the reporter, before calmly and professionally slamming the file drawer so hard the whole cabinet rocked. "Thanks a lot."

Peter was writing up the story of the beautification committee meeting on Friday afternoon when his telephone rang.

"Mr. Slater? Yes. Mrs. Neville calling," she said.

"Dr. Mackenzie suggested that I talk to you. She told me, although I am not sure I understand the process, that the man in charge of ruining Medicine Lake was allowed to check your stories on his work for factual accuracy. Is that correct?"

Peter had really hoped Delta would not mention this sort of thing to anyone else. Trapped, he had to confess.

"Yes, but only because my publisher ordered it --"

"Oh, I quite understand," Mrs. Neville said, too quickly for Peter's comfort. "I was simply wondering whether for the sake of journalistic fairness you would grant our little group the same privilege?"

Peter silently cursed Stan and Bill for getting him

into this mess.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Neville, but I really can't," he said.

His words fell into an ominous silence.

"I see," said the chairwoman finally. "Then we will not be granted your willing cooperation?"

"Please try and understand my position, Mrs. Neville," Peter said in desperation. "I felt it was a mistake to allow Mr. Mickliewicz to check the stories on him, but I was overruled. What choice did I have?"

There was an awkward pause.

"Very good, Mr. Slater, if that is your final word on the matter. Thank you for speaking with me."

As he hung up, Peter had a sick feeling Mrs. Neville had not said her last word on the subject.

Half an hour later he was in Bill's office, as his angry publisher demanded to know why he had been talking about office matters to outsiders, "even attractive ones who have dippy old lady friends who want to tell me how to run my newspaper!" The head of the beautification committee had apparently called Bill the instant she had hung up on Peter.

"And she tells me you weren't civil with her! Civil, my ass. Next time be civil, you idiot, or you might just find your rude ass out on the street! Do you hear me?"

Shaken, Peter went out for a coffee to settle his

nerves. Before he managed to get the first steaming mouthful, Willie Manybears came over to his table and laid down a copy of the Journal. On the front page was what Peter thought of as his "picnic piece," the article he had written after his trip out to the site with Delta.

"Another story on Medicine Lake, eh?" asked the guide. "You must really think it's going to be a big success."

"Well, what do you think?" Peter asked him.

Willie looked out the window before answering. "I think he's going to have trouble."

"Why?"

The guide shook his head. "Just a feeling."

Peter laughed. "C'mon, Willie. He's got enough men and equipment to do the job, and all the scientific know-how in the world. What's going to stop him? The spirits of the lake?" He regretted the words as soon as he spoke them. Willie's eyes narrowed.

"Who knows?" he asked deliberately. "Anything's possible."

Peter tried to apologize. "Listen, I didn't mean --" But Willie had already left. The reporter drank his coffee in morose silence as he added up the tally: Delta was mad at him, his publisher was mad at him, Helen Neville was mad at him, and now Willie was mad at him. It seemed the only people in town who liked what he had done that week were Stan and Julius Steele. It was an unpleasant feeling.

Chapter 11

Peter thought going to the dance at the Legion on Saturday night would take his mind off his troubles. The sun was beginning to sink behind the mountains as he left the house to walk the three blocks to the hall. When the first two people he spotted were Romeo Slipchuk and Judge Pennifold, his outlook brightened considerably. He had forgotten that there were people in town, besides Stan, who might like the way the paper had been handling the dam stories. He grabbed a rye and ginger at the bar and made his way towards them across the dance floor, between couples swaying to "Love Letters In the Sand" as performed by Wayne Duke and his Waltz Barons. Two steps onto the floor he was rammed amidships by some clumsy dancer. The collision slopped most of Peter's drink onto his shoes. He cursed softly, then stopped when he saw who had bumped him.

"Fancy running into you here," chortled Julius Steele as he swept Delta back into the crowd. She laughed as Steele dipped her dexterously.

Peter was in a grim mood as he set off again. So intent was he on manoeuvring safely across the hall that he didn't see Stan Mickliewiecz until he was right on top of him; to be precise, on top of Stan's right foot.

"Oh. Sorry," said Peter, taking a quick step back and leaving behind an smear on the immaculate black shine of

the engineer's oxford. Stan contemplated the ruin of his perfectly-shined footwear, gave Peter a look of distaste, and stalked off.

"Wonder where he's gonna find a shoeshine stand at this time of night," Romeo said cheerfully at Peter's elbow.

"Vancouver, I hope," the reporter said with some heat.

"Careful, my boy, you're talking about the benefactor of our community," Pennifold noted, coming up on Peter's other side. "That's the man who is bringing prosperity to Jasper."

"All I know is, everywhere he goes, I have bad luck," Peter said.

"Perhaps you just started off on the wrong foot!" Romeo said gleefully. "Get it? On the wrong foot!" The judge rolled his eyes. "C'mon, you guys! This is a party! Relax and enjoy yourselves. I've seen livelier stiff's on the slab." Shaking his head in disgust, the undertaker made off in search of more appreciative companions.

"Do you have a problem with Stan?" Pennifold asked.

"No problem," said Peter. "We just don't like each other much. Seems like every time we get near each other, something goes wrong."

"So stay away from him," the judge suggested.

"That," said Peter, "is a helluva good idea. That's exactly what I'm going to do, right after I get another

drink. How about you?"

The judge held up his beer. "I'm fine," he said.

"Wish me luck," Peter said.

But Pennifold wasn't paying attention. "That's too much," he said, staring across the hall. "Look at that! Some people have no sense of occasion." Peter followed his gaze. A man in stained work clothes stood in the doorway, neck craned as if he were looking for someone.

"Looks like somebody's got troubles," Peter said.

"Just as long as it's not me. I'll be right back."

This time he sidled carefully around the edge of the dance floor and managed to avoid serious bodily contact until he reached the safety of the bar. Intent on placing his order, he didn't realize for a moment that he was standing next to Stan Mickliewiecz. The engineer was staring at him. Peter sighed and was about to apologize again for standing on Stan's foot, when the man in work clothes appeared and elbowed him out of the way.

"Boss, you gotta come quick," he said to Mickliewiecz.

"The sandbags aren't holding."

For the first time Peter had ever seen, Stan straightened up to his full height.

"What are you talking about, Decker?" he demanded imperiously.

"Foreman said you should come right away, Mr. Mickliewiecz," said the workman. "Says to tell you we've

got burst sandbags all over the place, and the water level's all gone to hell."

Stan cursed and smashed a fist onto the bar with a thump that rattled the glasses. His eye fell on Peter.

"Satisfied, Mr. Reporter? Happy now? Or was there something else you wanted to say?"

Then he was off, striding through the crowd with Decker following in his wake. Peter stood with his mouth open and watched them go.

"Watcha doin', Peter? Catchin' flies? What's with your pal, Stan?"

It was Willie. "That guy just told Stan the sandbags aren't holding. The water level at the lake is dropping," Peter blurted.

The guide whistled and grinned. "I'll be damned. Where are they headed?"

"Out to look at --" then it dawned on Peter. "Holy cow. I've got to get out there and cover this. See ya later."

The biggest story of the year, and here he was at a Legion dance. At the door, he had to reach between Romeo and Delta to get his hat.

"Heading out so soon, Peter?" Delta asked.

"Your wish has come true, doctor," he said. "The sandbags aren't holding."

"What sandbags?" Romeo asked.

"The ones at Medicine Lake. Stan's sandbags. Some guy from the crew just came in to tell him. I've got to get out there and take pictures. Oh, if you see my publisher, tell him what's happened!"

Peter ran to the newspaper office, and grabbed his equipment, picking up notepad, pen, film, camera, and flashbulbs on the fly. He was out the door before he remembered he'd left his car at Mrs. McNeil's. He sprinted the four blocks to his landlady's and threw himself into the car. The adrenaline rush to his head made his ears pound and his heart race, and he panted for breath. Damn, he thought, sometimes this job is FUN.

When Peter arrived at the project site twenty minutes later, he found himself parking behind two dozen other cars

"What kept you?" Willie called from beside Delta and Julius Steele.

"I had to get my camera," Peter replied, jogging over to them.

"Won't do you any good," Steele said. "The workers aren't letting anybody in."

"We'll just see about that," Peter said cheerfully, pleased at the chance to show off in front of Delta. "I'm going to get this story come hell or high water." He left Delta, Willie, and Julius and pushed his way through the crowd.

"Comin' through," he called out, edging his way

between bodies, thumping people casually with his camera bag. "Reporter in a hurry. Gangway there!"

The workers who formed a barrier across the entrance to the site weren't so easily brushed aside. Peter was about to start arguing with them when Judge Pennifold appeared, looking unhappy.

"Let him through," he told the men. "He's going to report it anyway." He took Peter by the elbow. "Stan's been expecting you. He's down by the lake."

The engineer was standing on the shore, holding a wet, empty sandbag, and staring into the waters like a heron which had let a fish slip away.

"Peter. Good of you to come," said the engineer quietly.

His welcome surprised Peter. He was expecting, at the very least, some display of ill-temper. Reserved courtesy was not even on his list of possible responses. But he had a job to do, and no time to worry about Stan's behavior. He pulled out his notebook, prepared at any time to have the interview turn into a shouting match.

Instead, the engineer answered his questions politely. Yes, there had been trouble. Massive failure of the sandbags was indicated everywhere they had been laid down. Yes, every single one of them. No exceptions. No, he did not know why. "Maybe Manybears' great spirits got mad at me," he said wryly. Stan went on to say he might be tempted

to guess that it was a combination of increased water pressure from the spring runoff and weaknesses in the material of the bags, but there was no way of knowing for sure. He doubted they would try sandbags again.

At the end, Peter took a deep breath. If Stan was going to be provoked at all tonight, this question would make him explode.

"Has the project failed?" he asked.

Judge Pennifold had been standing with the two during the interview. Now he shook his head, while Stan appeared lost in thought before answering.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I suppose you might say it has. Work will terminate unless we can find something stronger than sandbags very quickly. And I don't have any idea what that might be. I'll have to talk to the judge and his group about that later. Now, if you'll excuse me." And he began to walk back up the rocky slope towards the road.

"Does this mean your attempt to bring Jasper into the 1950's is over?" Peter called after him boldly.

"Possibly," the engineer answered, his thin shoulders slumped. "I'm not really sure. Why? Would that make you happy?" He left without waiting for a reply.

By Monday evening, Jasper was in turmoil. When Stan had driven away from the work site Saturday night, he had not gone into town. Whether he had taken the gravel road to the east or headed west towards Vancouver and the coast, no

one knew.

"It's not knowing that gets to me," Bill said, slapping his hand on his desk in frustration. Peter had just gone into the office to report his failure to trace Stan through any of the police detachments within a hundred miles. His instructions from the publisher had been terse. "Find out where he's gone and get an interview with him. I don't care how much you have to spend. Just do it."

But the long distance bills had been run up in vain.

"Nobody's seen hide nor hair," was all Peter had to report.

"He can't just disappear," Bill snapped. "Keep calling. There's too much at stake to give up so soon."

Peter had been on the telephone since early Sunday. Monday morning, he had been so desperate for information that he had gone to the land rights option exchange to see if Romeo knew anything. Although it was only nine a.m., the place was in chaos. When Peter arrived, the mortician was besieged by a half dozen angry investors, while both telephones rang incessantly.

"If I knew where that sonofabitch was, do you think I'd be playing games like this!" he shouted when the reporter asked about Stan.

As Peter walked back to the office, Mrs. Neville stopped him. "The committee is having a little service of thanksgiving at the Anglican church tonight, now that this

disgraceful project has come to an appropriate end. We would be most happy if you could come."

Peter was forced to plead the weekly townsite committee meeting as his excuse. Mrs. Neville was not fazed.

"Oh, that is unfortunate. Still, Dr. Mackenzie did warn me you would not come. Such a remarkable young woman - and so well suited to Dr. Steele, don't you think? Good day, Mr. Slater."

Peter was sitting at his desk, brooding over Mrs. Neville's words when he was interrupted by Bill.

"Well?" demanded the publisher. "Where is he?"

The reporter was still mulling over the idea of Delta and Steele together.

"Where's who?" he asked irritably.

"Who do you think?" his boss snapped. "Stan! What did you find out?"

"Nothing!" Peter hadn't meant it to come out that sharply. He softened his tone. "Bill, nobody knows anything. The cops, the hospitals, other newspapers, hell, I even asked Romeo! I've checked every logical source --"

"Then try some illogical ones!" Bill shouted. "You're a newsman - get me news! I don't care if it takes a gypsy with a crystal ball or an Indian medicine man!"

It occurred to Peter that his employer was not being

rational about the Stan situation. But, he decided, seeing the strain on Bill's face, now was not the time to debate the point. It struck him that his publisher might even have a good idea. He grabbed his notebook and headed for the door.

Fifteen minutes later, he was leaning against a hitching rail at Fletcher's livery stables, telling Willie Manybears about Bill's behavior.

"When he started talking about medicine men," he concluded, "don't ask me why, but I thought of you."

Willie leaned on his pitchfork. He had been mucking out Annabelle's stall when Peter arrived.

"Well," he said, "I'm no medicine man but this is one time I'm sure of what I'm saying. I really think . . . ,"

Willie hesitated, then went on with confidence. "In fact, I'm almost completely positive I know what happened to Stan."

"You do?" Peter knew he should have been surprised, but, somehow, he wasn't.

Willie tilted his head to the sky and examined the cloud formations drifting overhead. He closed his eyes and sniffed the breeze. To Peter it smelled heavily of horse, but, he reminded himself, he was just a city kid. Perhaps Willie's senses were attuned to things he couldn't detect. He kept a respectful silence.

Finally, Willie spoke.

"Yes, now I'm sure," he said firmly. He cast one last lingering look at the sky and pointed to a seagull flying overhead. "The spirits have him."

Peter grabbed his notebook and started scribbling. This, he told himself, is fantastic!

"The spirits of the waters? Like under Medicine Lake?" he asked. He held his breath waiting for the answer.

Willie nodded solemnly. "Spirits of the waters?" Then his round face broke into a grin. "More like spirits of the malt, and of the rye: white man's spirits. You know, booze," he explained. "He's holed up somewhere drunk as a skunk, you bet."

Taken again, Peter thought, exasperated. "Why do I let you do this to me?"

Willie howled with laughter. "Damned if I know. But don't stop. Oh, Christ. The spirits have him - and you bought it!" He leaned on his pitchfork and gasped for breath.

"Very funny," Peter said. Willie pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"Oh, geez. Listen, Pete, tell your boss not to worry about Stan," the guide advised. "He'll come back when the firewater runs out - with a roaring thirst, a big head, and breath that would kill a maggot. But he'll be back." He drove his fork into the soiled straw. "He's the type of guy you can't keep away with a cannon."

Stan's bender became the stuff of legends in Jasper. By the time he showed up on Tuesday night, rumor had located him everywhere in North America, alive and dead, in sickness and in health. His return was even more spectacular.

Wednesday morning, Peter was sitting in the RCMP detachment, across the desk from Sgt. Jack McGillivray.

"Was Mr. Mickliewiecz drunk?" the sergeant considered Peter's question. "Ye-e-e-s," he said meditatively, "he did show some signs of intoxication."

"What was the key, in your professional opinion, to forming this conclusion?" Peter asked in his best police-beat-reporter manner.

McGillivray deliberated briefly, leaning back from his spartanly clean desk.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "It might have been his general appearance, his apparent difficulty performing basic motor functions, or the distinct smell of alcohol on his breath." He toyed with a pewter letter opener, as a smile spread across his face. "But when he finished tossing his cookies on our geraniums, then stood in front of the detachment shouting that we were all a bunch of pansies and he could lick us with one hand tied behind his back, I would say that was when I decided he was intoxicated."

"Oh, my," said Peter, fighting down a grin of his own.

"What happened then?"

"He tried to take Tim Carvers' head off, that's all," the sergeant said.

"You're kidding," Peter said reverently.

McGillivray shook his head. "Nope. Stan went at him swinging like a gate. Wildest puncher I ever saw." Peter's stomach sank as he tried to contemplate the damage a sober Carvers could do to a drunken Stan.

"Is that when Stan was knocked out?" he asked.

"Yep," said McGillivray complacently. "He kept swinging, and Tim kept ducking, then finally Stan spun himself all the way around and fell flat on his face on the sidewalk."

"Carvers didn't hit him?"

"Nope. Didn't have to. Stan was out cold as a mackerel. So we tossed him in cells and brought Dr. Steele over to check him out. We'll release him this afternoon if he's stopped puking. He's gonna be one awful sick fella when he sobers up."

"Did he say anything about his plans? About the dam project?"

"It's hard to tell," McGillivray admitted. "He's just lying on the bunk, moaning. But I'll tell him you want to see him when we let him out. Take my advice: stay upwind of him until he's showered."

Chapter 12

The next morning, Stan came into Peter's office looking like a walking corpse. He carried a briefcase, and was nattily attired in a chalk-striped blue suit, a crisp white shirt which set off the pallor of his skin, and a red tie which matched his bloodshot eyes. A dark bruise discolored the left side of his jaw.

"Morning, Stan," Peter said, once he got over the shock of the engineer's appearance. "How're you feeling?"

"How I feel doesn't matter," said he said, setting down his brief case and folding himself into the chair by Peter's desk in slow motion. He put his hands up and, with a gentle, circular motion of his fingers, rubbed his temples. "What does matter is that I've discovered the way to make the Medicine Lake project go."

Reaching for his notebook, Peter asked, "More sandbags?"

The engineer winced. "No, I don't think so," he murmured. "I knew they weren't strong enough to handle the sustained pressure of that volume of water."

Peter's jaw almost dropped.

"But I thought the sandbags were your idea," he blurted.

The muscles around Stan's eyes tightened, making him look like a rabid wolverine. Peter leaned back hastily as

the red orbs glared at him.

"I don't know where you got that idea," Stan said. His voice was quietly ominous. "They weren't good enough. I wanted to use reinforced concrete and cofferdams, but my clients were concerned about costs. The sandbags were a compromise."

"You mean you didn't believe they would work?" Peter asked.

"I'm not the kind of man who would say anything to undermine public confidence in his employers," Stan declared, a touch of color returning to his face. "No matter how wrong they might be. Don't write that down!" he snapped, lurching to his feet to tower over the reporter, who fought down an impulse to take cover under his desk.

This was obviously, Peter decided, a situation where tact and diplomacy counted for more than journalistic accuracy. Moving slowly and deliberately, he put his pen down gently on the desk.

"Sure, Stan. Whatever you say." He held up his empty hands, and the engineer relaxed again. With an effort, he mastered himself and telescoped back into the chair. Peter decided the safe course was to go back to the beginning.

"You were saying you have the solution to Medicine Lake?" he said in his most cooperative manner.

The engineer collected his thoughts.

"Hm? Oh, yes. It's scientifically tested and proven,

and remarkably economical. Quite ingenious, really." He nodded as if he had explained it all. "You can write this down, if you want," he added graciously. Peter didn't bother to thank him, but picked up his pen anyway.

"So, what is this new material?" he forced himself to ask.

"All in good time," Stan replied, with a secret little grin that made his face alarmingly skull-like. "First I want to give you the background," he said enthusiastically, and his eyes lit up. Peter flinched.

Stan lifted his briefcase into his lap and took out a sheaf of papers. "Now, I've spent the last few days in intensive research," he began.

Peter felt his eyes widen, and he couldn't stop himself from interrupting.

"Research?" he said.

"Of course," said Stan. "What else?"

The reporter chose his next words carefully. "There have been the wildest rumors running around town that you were, ha ha, out on a bender."

Stan looked mildly shocked. "Do you have any witnesses to this so-called bender?"

Peter had to admit that he didn't.

"Well, then." The engineer waved a hand dismissively. Peter, however, persisted.

"But the police did find you in the middle of their

flower bed - and you weren't in very good shape."

Stan's face screwed up. Peter was halfway under his desk when he realised the engineer was laughing. Stan finally paused for breath.

"Seventy-two hours of intensive work without sleep," he said, by way of explanation. "Research on this." He waved his sheaf of papers. Peter peered at them but couldn't make out the writing. Stan went on, "I had a drink or two to celebrate my success, but I think I can be forgiven. It was the combination of fatigue, alcohol and an empty stomach: hardly a bender."

Peter was ready for him.

"And the official version from the police files?" he asked. "You were arrested for public intoxication, and attempted assault on a police officer. Sergeant McGillivray says that you spent the rest of the night in a cell, throwing up. Do you want to comment on that?"

"Damn right I do," Stan said with assurance.

Peter waited for the engineer to rip the cops to shreds.

"The RCMP are a fine group of men who do their jobs magnificently under trying conditions."

The reporter automatically jotted down the words, then stopped and read what he had written. I must have heard wrong, he told himself. But there was Stan, hitching his chair closer and dropping his voice to a conspiratorial

murmur. "What you can't put down, of course . . . , " and he paused until, reluctantly, Peter set his pen aside, "is that they had to have a cover story."

"Cover story?" Peter's hand twitched involuntarily towards his pen, but stopped under the intensity of Stan's glare. "Sorry," he muttered.

"It was a covert operation. I discovered that McGillivray and his men had just the things I needed for my experiments. While they were quite eager to help, they are civil servants and couldn't do anything without a cover story. That's why we staged that little charade out in the park - so no one would be suspicious."

"Charade?"

"Of course. You didn't think I was really drunk, did you?"

Sodden and stinking, Peter thought. "And that smell of alcohol and the fight with Powers?"

"A mickey of cheap rye poured over my clothes," Stan said easily, adding, "And who in his right mind would take on Tim Carvers?"

Peter found himself wanting to believe it all. If this was true, then anything was possible.

"But you were knocked out," he said.

"We wanted verisimilitude, and I got carried away," Stan countered.

Peter gave in.

"So, Stan," he said with a sigh, "tell me about the research, why don't you?"

"Only if you promise not to tell where it occurred." Somewhere behind the broken blood vessels, there was a twinkle in Stan's eye. What the hell, Peter decided. There was nothing to lose. He nodded.

"Mattresses are the key!" the engineer began.

"Mattresses?" Peter asked, bewildered.

But Stan was forging ahead. "And not just any mattresses but used mattresses."

"That's it? This is your big secret?" Peter was disgusted. He'd hoped for something more dramatic, with chlorophyll, or transistors, or, maybe even nuclear power. He said so.

"Why fool around with complex new technology when the answer is under our very noses?" Stan asked scornfully. "You see, Peter, over the last few days I have had a chance to observe mattresses close up. Might even say I had my nose buried in them."

Rubbed in them might be a better description, Peter reflected, recalling what Sergeant McGillivray had said about Stan's posture in the cell. Something puzzled him.

"How can a used mattress be stronger than a sandbag?" he asked.

"There is a way," said Stan. "You can vulcanize it!"

"Vulcanize?" said Peter. "Isn't that what you do to

rubber?"

"It is! It certainly is!" said Stan triumphantly as if he had explained something significant, spreading his sheaf of papers over Peter's desk. Then his face changed color.

"Geez," he said. "I'm gonna throw up. Where's your washroom?"

Much later, when Stan had finally gone, Peter took a single slip of paper and four scrawled pages of notes and went into his publisher's office. He sat in the armchair reserved for advertising clients. Bill glanced up from his paperwork.

"That's for paying customers," he said.

"I didn't think you'd mind," said Peter slowly. "Stan Mickliewicz wanted me to give you this." He handed over a cheque.

Bill read the amount and whistled.

"Is he trying to buy the whole paper?"

"Just one issue," Peter replied. "He wants us to run a four-page special edition."

"When?" asked the publisher.

"Tomorrow."

Bill looked at the cheque again, then nodded.

"Okay, for this kind of money, he can have it. What does he get out of it, though?"

Peter tossed the four pages of notes on the desk.

"Every used mattress in town," he said.

Chapter 13

Not since VJ Day had the citizens of Jasper seen the likes of the Journal that came out that Friday. In bold black headlines, it declared:

STAN'S THE MAN! RESEARCH REVEALS HOPE FOR MEDICINE LAKE PROJECT! MATTRESSES THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF PROSPEROUS FUTURE!

The rest of the front page was a single ad offering "Five dollars cash" for every used mattress brought to a depot to be set up in the rail yards across from the park warden's office. The story inside told of Stan's gallant struggle to find a solution to his sandbag woes and of his technical triumph, although the details of the process were not revealed. The story was pretty much what Peter had put down in his notes the previous day. But at the top of the page was written in bold type, "By Bill Tollstrup, Journal Publisher." Peter had firmly refused to run his own by-line on the story.

"You're not putting my name on that thing!" he had announced to Bill.

"You're kidding me." His boss was astonished. "You know how much cash Stan's spending for this?"

Peter folded his arms defiantly. "I don't care. I'm not taking credit."

"For what possible reason?" Bill demanded.

Peter shrugged. He had a bad feeling about the special edition. "It's not my story; Stan just told me what to put down. It's not right," he said, knowing his arguments sounded feeble.

"Well, that's nuts!" Bill glared at him, then relaxed. "Okay, Pete, you don't want your name on it, that's fine." He crossed the reporter's name off the typed copy and scribbled his own. "There. Is that good enough for you?"

Peter couldn't come up with an objection. "I guess so," he said reluctantly.

"Great!" Bill smiled triumphantly. "We'll run it like it is."

Within an hour of the extra hitting the street, the land option index soared, the beautification committee announced a special emergency meeting, and rumors ran wild. Stan was offering thirty dollars a mattress, no matter what kind of shape it was in. Forty dollars. Fifty! People throughout the town scurried into attics in search of long-forgotten beds, small children were persuaded to sleep together "just for one night, dear" and the local dump was besieged by fortune hunters. But Rosy Carter was there first, with the shotgun she carried to scare away the bears.

"Git!" she shouted at the intruders. "This is my dump. Go find yer own."

When she took to firing in the air to discourage

mattress poachers, Jack McGillivray had to step in. He arrived while Peter was at the landfill, taking pictures of an obliging Rosy to go with an article on the defence of her domain. As the police car pulled up, she turned to it with a whoop of joy.

"Jack, honey, you is come fer me at last!" Rosy called to the Mountie as he climbed out of his car. Unbelievably, McGillivray blushed as scarlet as his dress coat and grinned with embarrassment.

"Thank God he's here! The only real man in town," she confided to Peter as McGillivray picked his way over the trash towards them. "Got a right cross like Marciano."

"Rosy, you can't chase people off the dump with your shotgun." McGillivray cut to the heart of the matter. "It's against the law. You're only supposed to use the gun to scare bears."

"Weren't those bears?" Rosy twisted her face into a grotesque squint. "Don't see as good as I used to. They sure looked like bears to me."

"Bears, huh? Two-legged bears?" McGillivray wasn't going to be put off.

"Two-legged ones is some of the worst kinds," Rosy replied.

McGillivray sighed. "Rosy, you can't chase people off the dump with a shotgun. I'm not even supposed to let you have a gun in the park. So unless you're absolutely certain

that it's a four-legged bear, you've got to leave that twelve-gauge inside."

"Anything for you, Jack honey," she declared.

"You promise?" asked the sergeant.

"Cross my heart and hope to die." Rosy gestured over her mammoth chest. "There'll be no more trouble out of me."

McGillivray raised skeptical eyebrows. "I wish I could trust you, Rosy."

"You sure can now, Jack," she replied with gusto. "I got one of the boys to take all of the mattresses into town for me an hour ago. Ain't nothin' left out there but real trash - and the town folks is real welcome to paw through it. Hell, tell 'em to come out and have a party!"

Two local furniture dealers, sensing the bonanza, combined to offer a giant mattress trade-in sale. They'd give six dollars for an old mattress to anyone who bought a new one from them. Despite his misgivings about business features, Peter did a story on the merchants for the next regular paper.

"I couldn't resist," he told Bill, just before headlining the story, "Jasper Sleeps Better Because of Dam Project."

The article prompted a visit from Delta. Peter's joy at seeing her was short-lived, however, as immediately behind the doctor came Helen Neville. Delta brandished a

copy of the paper, mattress sale story uppermost.

"Have you seen this?" she demanded - somewhat illogically, Peter thought.

"Only when I wrote it," he explained. "That's why my by-line is on it."

"Never mind that," said Mrs. Neville. "We are here as representatives of the Committee to Preserve Jasper's Natural Beauty, and we would like you to come with us."

Peter could not help being amused.

"Am I under arrest?" he asked with a smile.

Delta looked at him from beneath stern brows.

"If I had my way, you would be," she declared grimly.

"But you ought to see this first. Bring your camera."

Peter shrugged and grabbed the Speedgrafix.

The two women guided him across the street and down to the outskirts of the railyard where Stan's quartermaster had set up his mattress buying station.

"There!" Delta said, pointing dramatically at the enormous pile of mattresses. Peter had seen it every day for almost a week. He wondered what the doctor found so startling.

"Yeah. So?" he inquired.

"So look at them!" Delta said, exasperated. "Oh, come on!" She grabbed Peter's arm and dragged him closer.

"Hey, watch the camera!" he yelped, almost falling over the low railing which separated the rail yard from the

sidewalk.

"Now take a picture of that!" Delta ordered.

"Why?" Peter wished he had asked that before this expedition started.

"Because they are a health hazard, and I'm going to have them removed. I'm a doctor, remember? These things are a filthy, stinking mess!" She kicked at the pile in frustration, dislodging an air force of flies. Peter stepped back hastily.

"It's not very nice, is it?" Delta asked, waving the insects away from her face.

Peter had to admit that the mattresses were an ugly sight. All of them had seen better days, and most featured a variety of impressive stains. Three nights of rain hadn't helped: the pile reeked of mildew and aged urine. It reminded him of the time he had come home from vacation to find that in his absence his toilet had backed up and his refrigerator had quit working.

"This is a perfect breeding ground for germs and vermin," Delta said. "And, you know, I can understand how people feel about the chance to make some money and increase tourism around here. That's how they earn their livings."

She paused. "But maybe you could tell me something. How on earth is it going to help the tourist industry to put a pile of filthy mattresses right beside the train

station on Jasper's busiest street?"

"I hadn't thought of it like that," Peter said defensively.

Delta sighed and put her hand on his arm. It made him feel better.

"I know you didn't do it maliciously, Peter, but you're helping this town ruin itself. Here, I'm going to point at the pile and you can take my picture for the paper. You can call the story 'Local Doctor Threatens to Shut Down Health Hazard.'"

"Actually," Peter said, peering through the viewfinder of the camera, "that's not a bad idea."

"Really?" Mrs. Neville said.

He had forgotten she was there and, for an instant, he resented the interruption. Then he nodded. "Why not? It's a legitimate news story. Delta's a doctor and a health authority. She says this stuff is a hazard? THAT I can report with a clear conscience."

"Be the only thing you have done," Delta muttered. But Peter could tell her heart wasn't in it. She took a deep breath. Peter was momentarily distracted the lift of her breasts. "No chance I can go over the story for technical errors, I suppose?"

Peter considered. The idea of Delta checking his story didn't bother him at all. "Wouldn't be a bad idea," he said. "You're the expert."

He stopped to enjoy the view. He hadn't realised how much he had missed Delta's smile lately.

The next day, the train from Edmonton pulled into the station, and two gunless Sherman tanks drove off it, heading down Connaught towards Medicine Lake, diesels roaring and caterpillar treads squealing. Behind them trailed a convoy of trucks carrying shrouded shapes and crates unloaded from the freight cars - and all of the mattresses.

Peter stood outside the Journal building with his publisher, watching the task force depart.

"What did Stan say he was going to do with those mattresses?" Bill asked.

"Vulcanize them," Peter said.

"Oh," said Bill.

The reporter went back inside and looked up "vulcanize" in his Random House Dictionary. "To treat rubber with sulfur while under moderate heat (230 degrees F. to 285 degrees F.) to render it nonplastic and give greater elasticity, durability, etc.," it said. Peter closed the book and set it down. "But what," he asked out loud, "does that have to do with Sherman tanks?"

Chapter 14

With the mattresses went any chance of running the story of Delta's complaints about them. Peter had to call her and break the news.

"I'm afraid we can't use the article now," he told the doctor.

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Because the mattresses are gone. There's no hazard any more."

"So you're not going to put my story in your paper?" Her tones were ominous.

"I can't." He began to explain, but she cut him off.

"You mean you could but you won't!" she said, and slammed the phone down. Peter already had the receiver held well away from his ear.

He hoped the next person he called wouldn't get as angry. He took a deep breath and telephoned Stan at his hotel room. He had to find out how armored vehicles could cook rubber. When he posed the question to Stan, the engineer chuckled.

"Why don't you come out tomorrow and see for yourself?" he asked. The next morning, Peter drove out to Medicine Lake, savouring the fresh mountain air, made all the sweeter by the knowledge that he would soon be breathing dust and diesel fumes.

Even so, he wasn't prepared for the odor that hung over the camp. It wasn't just the exhaust fumes, but the thick, biting stink of rubber and sulfur and, above all, a sharp, chemical reek that he couldn't identify and which burned his sinuses. Yet, in spite of the assault on his nose, what he saw struck Peter most forcefully. Directly in front of him, on the far side of the camp, the two Sherman tanks were parked twenty feet above the ground, each sitting on top of Peter blinked to clear his eyes, but they weren't deceiving him. The tanks were parked on top of mounds of mattresses, hundreds of them, all of apparently one color. Then he noticed that the open area at the centre of the camp was dominated by a huge, blackened, industrial kettle, attended by three grotesque figures in gas masks and heatproof suits. A third, smaller pile of mattresses stood nearby and the gnomes of the kettle were taking the mattresses one by one and lowering them into the cauldron.

Peter climbed out of his car and stood, amazed, until Stan brought him back to reality by handing him a hard hat. The engineer was grinning hugely.

"You look a little surprised," he said.

"What on earth is all this?" Peter asked.

"This," said Stan, "is vulcanizing."

Peter began to take notes. "Okay, so you're heating rubber and sulfur. But what about all the rest of this

stuff, and why does it have to smell so bad?"

Stan laughed and took him on a tour. He strode along so quickly on his long, bird-like legs that Peter had to trot to keep up with him. Still a heron, Peter thought, but a happy heron. He pulled himself together to get down Stan's explanation of vulcanizing. The word, the engineer said, was a term applied to two separate processes.

"It's strengthening rubber, all right, which is what the boys are doing in the boiler," he pointed out as they approached the huge pot. The heat coming from the gas jets at its base was considerable, Peter realized, as he began to sweat under his light sports jacket. It must be hell inside those protective suits.

"We're well ahead of schedule," Stan went on. "With three men on the cauldron --"

"Cauldron?"

"Yeah, that's what the boys have nicknamed the boiler."

"Any trouble getting the men to do that? It looks toilsome."

"Not really. They balked at first, but I offered double time to anybody who'd wear the gear. Now there's no problem."

The rubber went in as block-like chunks, from the supply stacked up on pallets beside the boiler. Stan showed Peter the barrel of treated sulfur that was added to the

molten mixture to create the vulcanizing effect.

"Once the mattresses are dipped and thoroughly coated with the rubber, we lay them on the ground to cure," Stan said.

Peter thought he understood now. "So that's how you vulcanize a mattress," he said.

"Oh, no, it's not," said Stan. "It's how you vulcanize rubber. But that's only half the story. That," he said, pointing at the tanks, "is how you vulcanize mattresses."

"You squash them?" Peter was perplexed. He was now close enough to see that the Shermans were not sitting directly on the mattresses but on two huge, thick metal plates which rested on the piles. The engineer nodded.

"Yup. If you treat cloth with acid, then compress it, it vulcanizes. It toughens the material, gives it strength. It's common practice in making electrical insulation," he said. "We're just doing it on a bigger scale."

The acid accounted for the sharp smell discernible under the acrid odor of the rubber, Peter thought. "And the tanks?"

"Cheaper than a hydraulic press," Stan said. "I picked them up surplus for next to nothing. And, since they're self-propelled, a lot easier to bring to a remote location. Effective, too. Look." He lifted up one corner of a vulcanized mattress. "Even with the rubber coating, it's now less than an inch thick."

"So why dip the mattresses in rubber, too?" the reporter asked.

Stan smiled. "Waterproofing. First we squash them with the tanks, then we coat them."

There was a technical brilliance to it all which Peter had to admire, and he said so. Stan almost straightened up with pleasure.

"Come on," he said. "I'll show you the rest of the operation."

As they walked down to the shoreline, Peter could see that the lake level was clearly lower than it had been in May. He mentioned it to Stan who, to his surprise, chuckled.

"Doesn't matter now. Once we get this new technology in place," he said as a heat-suited figure went by dragging a rubber coated mattress, "we'll be able to hold the water in and save the rest of the season for Pennifold and his friends." He turned to the reporter.

"It's ironic but the fact that the lake is lower is actually helping us."

Peter was intrigued. "How?"

"I'll show you." Stan led him over to where a crew in waders and hip boots was wrestling with a rubberized mattress. "If you come right down here you can actually see where water is flowing out into the underwater channels. Okay, boys, take a break," he ordered.

The workers stood still and Peter heard running water, even over the engine noises from the camp.

"It sounds like there's a waterfall down there," he observed.

"Yeah," said one of the crew. Stratton. Peter remembered him from the train station. "Niagara Falls - and we're here on our honeymoon." The others laughed.

"All right," said Stan testily. "Enough leaning on your shovels. Everybody back to work."

"Could I ask a favor?" Peter cut in quickly. "If everybody is working at once, it's hard for me to get a good picture. Could a couple of men put a mattress in place so I can get some close up shots?"

Stan looked stubborn. Peter went for his vulnerable spot.

"It's for the front page." He knew the words "front page" would catch Stan's attention. But the engineer still wasn't sure.

"Well, we do have a strict schedule to keep," he said dubiously. Peter sighed. Drastic times called for drastic measures.

"Say, Stan, I've got an idea!" he said. "Why don't you do it with one of the guys here? An action shot! 'Stan pitches in on dam project.'"

He hardly had to finish the sentence.

"I suppose it would be all right," said the engineer,

with a show of reluctance that wouldn't have fooled a two-year old. "Anything to please the newspaper. You know how it is, fellas." He appealed to the crew for sympathy. They gave it gladly. Anything to get a paid coffee break, Peter suspected. They settled themselves comfortably on the shore to watch.

Stan borrowed a pair of work gloves and commandeered a set of waders. He grabbed a rubberized mattress and slid it into the water.

"Say," he said suddenly, "would you like to see the whole process? Start to finish? Sort of a photographic record?"

Peter thought he was kidding.

"You mean for future generations of people working with rubber-coated mattresses?" he asked.

"Precisely," Stan said with enthusiasm. "Wouldn't that be great?"

Great wasn't the word Peter would have chosen, but it might be useful to have for the files.

"Yeah," he said. "Why not?"

At Stan's instruction Stratton took a can of the white dye used to locate the cracks and poured it into the lake.

"As with the sandbags, the first step is to find exactly where the cracks are," Stan lectured. He took a skindiver's mask and stooped over to peer into the water. "Then when we spot them - does it make a better picture if

I point down?" Peter assured him it did. "There." He dragged over his mattress and checked through the mask to get the right position, giving himself directions. "Further up . . . right, a little more, more right . . . there, perfect. Then we work the mattress-based material into the crack with shovels. Stratton, give me a shovel."

Stan reversed the shovel and began pushing on the mattress with the handle. Stratton grabbed a second shovel and began to work on the other end of the mattress. Peter was puzzled.

"Wouldn't it be easier to use the blade of the shovel?" he asked.

Stan did not pause in his careful tamping and probing.

"Greater danger of breaking through the rubber skin. Once the integrity of the mattress is breached you might as well not have it in there at all. Take it easy, Stratton!" Stan snapped at the laborer, who was making rapid progress and exercising visibly less care than the engineer. "Be careful, you'll --," he added as Stratton dove face first into the water.

"Jesus," said the workman, spluttering as he came to the surface. "I must have gone clean through."

Peter borrowed a mask to have a closer look. The shovel handle was stuck deeply into the mattress. As he watched, a bit of white dye was sucked along the shovel and vanished through the hole in the mattress.

Stan took out his anger on the crew.

"After watching Straton reef on his shovel like he's trying to dig his way through to China," he said, obviously steaming, "I thought I'd give you ANOTHER lesson in how I want this done." He had Stratton yank out the old mattress and bring over a fresh one. Stan bent down and positioned the new mattress. He motioned for his shovel.

"Insert the handle gently, like this." Stan lowered the wood almost tenderly. "Once you meet resistance, GENTLY twist the handle back and forth to work the fabric into the crack." He demonstrated. Peter was impressed. With a minimum of effort, Stan seemed to be getting a great deal of the mattress to go into what must be a relatively small crack. From the amount of mattress he could still see above the water, Peter estimated a good foot of its length had been forced into the lake bed.

"There," said the engineer in quiet satisfaction when he judged that enough mattress had been put in place. "That's how you should do it." He raised his shovel in a gesture of triumph, which Peter dutifully recorded with the camera.

"Now, all of you get your masks and have a look at how the damming material should be placed." As the men crowded into the water to see, Stan took a step back to give them room, slipped on a rock, and fell backwards into the water. The workmen didn't move to help him out, and Peter caught

more than one grin. The engineer pulled himself to his feet and slopped out of the water. Peter made sure he had a shot of Stan arising from the waves.

"Don't you dare use any of that in your newspaper," Stan shouted to him, squishing his way back to the construction shack. "I'll sue you. I will!"

Peter didn't answer. He had no intention of using that particular picture in the paper, he told himself. Unless, of course, Stan wanted to edit his stories again. It's really not blackmail, he soothed his conscience, it's insurance.

In two weeks, work on the Great Mattress Project was finished. Throughout Jasper, people were sleeping on bare boards or brand new bedding. Rumor had it that Rosy's post-mattress party was still going on.

One week after, word came in from the technicians at the lake. The mattresses hadn't worked. The water level was sinking again.

"Wonder why?" Romeo mused out loud at coffee in the Sunrise.

"Maybe all his boys were lying down on the job," Willie suggested.

Chapter 15

Stan was so discouraged by the failure that he didn't even bother to get drunk. He was packed and ready to leave town within twenty-four hours. Judge Pennifold and his group had left for Edmonton to talk to their bankers. The engineer had had to deal with clean-up at the site before he could go to join them as the group's technical adviser.

"I don't understand," he told Peter, as they waited for the Edmonton train. The reporter had come out to get a quote for a front page story on the future of the project. "It should have worked. My figures," Stan said, patting his briefcase, "showed that it was going to work."

"What happened?"

The engineer stared at the tracks and shook his head.

"I don't know. The mattresses failed even faster than the sandbags." He gave a bitter laugh. "Maybe Willie's spirits got them."

Stan was in no mood to enjoy the glories of the dawn. Jasper glistened in the morning light of a new summer day. An overnight rainstorm had left puddles to reflect the gray clouds hiding the heads of the mountains. A warm moist wind blew, playing with the upturned collar of Stan's trench coat.

"Any chance of the project going ahead in any form?" Peter asked.

"Is this for you or the paper?"

"The paper." Personally, Peter didn't see any way Stan could wriggle out of this failure.

"Any chance? Yeah, there's A chance." Stan spoke with sudden sarcasm. "All I have to do is persuade my backers to pour more money in this mess, AND manage to find some material which can be stuffed into the cracks which will then somehow magically expand to block them tighter than a bathroom drain plug. It will have to be dirt cheap, plentiful, and available instantly. That's all. Sure there's a chance. Like hell there is!" Moodily, Stan kicked over a bundle of Jasper Journals destined for readers down the rail line in Hinton. The papers tipped over into a puddle and Peter leaped to pull them to safety.

"Why bother?" Stan said. "They'll dry out again. It's only paper."

A distant whistle announced the imminent arrival of the train.

"You never delivered papers, did you?" Peter asked, stepping to the edge of the platform to see if he could spot the locomotive.

"No, thank God," replied Stan. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"When you have to pay for your own papers, you learn real fast that if a bundle gets dumped in a puddle, the papers soak up so much water they burst the twine. Makes a

helluva mess."

"Well, right now I don't give a damn," Stan said. He made another move towards the bundle, but Peter slid it around behind him protectively. The Jasper Journal might not be much of a newspaper, but it was the only one he had.

The train pulled up with a roar of air brakes, and Stan grabbed his suitcase.

"Good luck, Stan," Peter said to show that there were no hard feelings. He picked up the newspapers to hand in to the baggage car. The engineer swung onto the train before answering.

"I don't need luck. I need that miracle absorbent material. If you can provide that, cheap, I might be able --," Stan stopped, his eyes on the newspapers Peter held.

"Might be able to what?" Peter asked in puzzlement.

"Nothing," said Stan, elaborately casual. "Nothing at all. Here, let me take those newspapers for you."

Chapter 16

When Stan came back into town two days later, Peter was overcome with a desire to avoid him.

"I know what he's going to say," he told his publisher when Bill called him in that morning to let him know of the engineer's return. "He'll have this brilliant idea based on charts and percentages and pounds per square inch on how his latest idea- which I gave him, God help me - will be the sure solution to damming Medicine Lake. And then I'll have to write about it - again." A trapped feeling washed over him. The scowl on his boss's face showed he had troubles of his own.

"I don't see what your problem is," Bill snapped. "He's got guts, that's all!"

Peter wondered how much of a loss Bill had taken on the land option exchange in the past week. Millions? Thousands? In the words of Albert the Alligator, hundreds might well be involved.

"Listen," he said soothingly, "it's not that I have anything against Stan, it's just that I'm wondering if our readers might not start to doubt his credibility, that's all."

That was not, apparently, what Bill wanted to hear.

"Credibility, my ass," he declared. "I'm running this newspaper, and anything Stan says is based in scientific

fact and logic and good for Jasper! I want him interviewed and you're going to do it!"

Peter opened his mouth to reply, then shut it when he saw Bill's fierce glare.

"Now get out and get to work!" The publisher stood up and pointed abruptly. "If you don't want this job there are people who do!"

The reporter went back to his desk. He put a sheet of paper in the typewriter but wrote nothing. Bill charged out of his office, growled at Elsie that he would not be back "the rest of the damned day," and slammed the front door on his way out. Peter stared blankly at the white paper. His stomach hurt. Fifteen minutes passed. He had to talk to somebody about this. He glanced at his watch. Almost 9:30. A walk, he thought. Take a walk. Settle the nerves.

He didn't pay any attention to where he was going until he stood inside the clinic.

"Dr. Mackenzie asked me for coffee," he told the receptionist as he went around her desk. In a way, it was true. Delta had once asked him to join her. A thought struck him. "Does she have a lot scheduled for today?"

"No, just a couple of patients this morning," the receptionist said.

Peter nodded his thanks.

Delta was sitting in the lunch room with Julius Steele and two of the clinic nurses. Peter could tell they had all

been laughing at some comment of Steele's.

"Good morning," Peter said, standing across from Delta and looking directly into her eyes. Odd how he could see her more clearly than the other three. "I'd like to talk to you if you've got a minute." He considered. "And even if you haven't. Julius can take care of your patients. I checked. Come on. We'll walk."

He should have been surprised when she nodded and said, "I'll get my coat." But somehow it seemed like the only possible thing she could say.

As they left the clinic, he took her hand, and they walked in silence for several blocks. Then all Peter's feelings about dealing with Stan, Medicine Lake, and his publisher came pouring out.

"Sounds like you don't have any choice," she said finally. "You have to do a story on him."

"I know, I know!" Peter said, frustrated. "But I'm so tired of being associated with Stan. I'm not his personal private PR flack. But Bill wants the story, so what the hell am I supposed to do? God, I hate this business sometimes." Delta squeezed his hand. A block later, she stopped abruptly. There was a smile on her face and a surge of hope went through Peter.

"You've thought of something," he said.

"Maybe," Delta replied, eyes on the sidewalk. They took a few more steps before she asked, "Why don't you just

tell the truth?"

"That's it?" Peter was disappointed.

Delta grabbed his arm.

"Yes. That's precisely it. I've read your stories, and I've paid attention. You know a lot of ways of telling the truth, mister. All you have to do is choose the best one."

"All of my stories are the truth," he protested.

"Oh, yeah? Stan goes off on a three-day bender, and you report he was on a research trip! And why? Because he told you so. But when you interview Mrs. Neville, suddenly it's 'Mrs. Neville claims' and 'Helen Neville alleges.' "

"But she's no technical expert," he said defensively.

"She only talks about grammar and scenery."

"And you're still convinced Stan is an expert?"

Delta's voice rose an octave on the last word. "An expert on sandbags? Rubberized mattresses? THAT'S technology?"

"Well, when you put it like that," Peter admitted.

Stepping back, Delta let go of his arm.

"The question, Peter," she said, "is not how I put it, but how you'll put it."

It was food for thought, Peter knew. He avoided Delta's level gaze.

"I have to get back," she said, finally. "It isn't fair to leave Julius with all my patients."

"He'll be fine." Peter wanted her to stay with him.

"Yes, but what about my patients?"

He said he would walk back with her, hoping they could spend a few more minutes together.

"We're at the clinic," Delta pointed out.

Peter looked up. "I hadn't noticed," he said in surprise."

"Thank you," she said and dimpled. "That's the nicest compliment I've had in weeks."

Peter opened his mouth to explain he hadn't meant it as a compliment but sensibly shut it again. Maybe that was exactly what he had meant.

"Let me know how it goes," Delta said. "Call me tonight?"

Peter figured he could manage something along those lines. She went inside, and he walked thoughtfully back to the newspaper.

Chapter 17

Still pondering Delta's words, Peter set up another interview with Stan to talk about the new plan for Medicine Lake. It was, as he feared, even odder than the mattress idea. This time the crew was going to use thousands of pounds of old magazines and stuff them individually into the cracks in the bottom of the lake.

"Newspapers get too fragile with time," Stan explained. "On the other hand, magazines are often printed on coated stock. The chemical treatment should make all the difference in terms of longevity."

"How does your crew feel about this?" Peter asked. Stan snorted.

"What difference does that make? They either do what they're told or they get fired."

The reporter's sympathy was with the crew, and when Stan made a special request, Peter almost refused him. Eventually, he said yes, and then headed back to the paper to write up the latest installment in the saga of Stan. But this chapter, he told himself, would be very different.

The story made Bill raise his eyebrows as he read. "'Mickliewiecz claims'? 'Believes'? 'Is of the opinion that'?" He tossed the pages onto his desk and leaned back, lacing his fingers behind his head. "What's going on here, Peter?"

Peter wished his palms wouldn't sweat. He was convinced that his boss would see them and realize what he was up to, so he stuffed them in his pockets.

"Just reporting a story. Isn't it all right?" he asked casually.

Bill shrugged. "Doesn't inspire much confidence, does it?"

This was safe ground, and Peter relaxed.

"Well, I talked to Stan for an hour, and I got the impression he wasn't too confident himself," Peter said. "No charts, no figures, no data. He just didn't have the kind of research support he's brought with the other proposals."

"Hm," said Bill, half to himself, his thoughts elsewhere - in the land option office, Peter figured. "That doesn't sound good," the publisher said. "You're sure about Stan?"

It was Peter's turn to shrug. "He's putting an awful lot of confidence in the strength of paper. I wasn't convinced."

Bill chewed the inside of his lower lip and nodded.

"Well, you can't do more than report the facts the way you see them. Let's go with that." He handed the story back to the reporter. "Run it."

Peter had one more thing to bring up. However reluctantly, he had given his word to the engineer.

"I promised Stan I'd ask you about running a sidebar," he told his employer.

"Sure," said Bill. "What on?"

"On where and how people can contribute magazines."

"Free publicity?" The publisher was amused. "Fat chance. He's got lots of money to spend on ads."

Peter shook his head. "Not anymore, he says. It's either a shoestring budget, or no go. He and Pennifold couldn't pry any more money out of the bankers in Edmonton."

"Seriously?" Bill asked.

"I think so."

The publisher stared off into the distance, then blinked. "Yeah, I guess it's okay to do it this once. Just don't tell anybody, or we'll never sell another ad. They'll all be in here, pleading bankruptcy."

That was on a Thursday. By the time the paper came out the next week, Stan had turned into a human dynamo. He was like a man possessed, and the vision that possessed him was the idea of "defeating Medicine Lake." He addressed the Boy Scouts, the Cub Scouts, the Rotary, the Lions, the Kinsmen, the Knights of Columbus, the Elks, the Legion, the Chamber of Commerce, the Eagles, and the Foresters; he invaded every regular male get-together in town, or leaned on the biggest investors in the land option exchange to organize special meetings for him. His message at all of them was

the same: "Give me the magazines and I'll finish the job!"

Stan's fervor was infectious. He appealed to his listener's patriotism, their civic pride, and their desire to be "part of the advancing tide of technology which will sweep us on to victory." He never specified victory over what.

"I can't afford to pay you for the magazines now," he always concluded. "But I guarantee that your investment will be returned to you in the future - the future that waits for Jasper!"

When he spoke to the luncheon meeting of the Chamber, Peter tried to restrain Bill from offering the entire contents of the Jasper Journal morgue to the engineer's paper drive.

"He can have a copy of every newspaper printed in this town," the publisher declared, clutching Peter's arm and spilling his coffee.

"He can't use newsprint," the report argued, sopping up the liquid with a handful of paper napkins. "Just stock-coated magazines."

His eyes shining, Bill wouldn't listen.

"It'll be a symbol," he said. "A gesture! They're just old newspapers."

Peter was appalled. An newspaper without its morgue was unthinkable.

"But the whole history of the town is in those

papers!" he said.

"I'm not interested in the past," Bill announced - somewhat petulantly, Peter thought. "I'm concerned about the future. Damn things are just taking up room in the basement, anyway." The publisher got up from the table and elbowed his way through the crowd surrounding Stan to make his offer.

To Peter's relief, the engineer turned Bill down.

"No," he said, shaking Bill's hand. "You'll need those papers some day to remind you of what Jasper was. Because, believe me, when I get finished, no one will recognize it!"

Bill Tollstrup's feelings were shared by dozens of other citizens, and the power of Stan's rhetoric had things moving faster than Peter would have believed if he hadn't seen it with his own eyes. Even as the Journal hit the street on Wednesday, the Scouts and Cubs organized paper drives, and small boys with wagons, and bigger boys in pickup trucks and cars loaded with bundles of magazines were wheeling up to the rodeo grounds on the edge of town where Stan had established his depot.

The engineer had made no bones about his lack of funds, and Peter arrived to find volunteers unloading and sorting the deliveries, and loading the bundles onto waiting, olive-green trucks. He had a sudden desire to ask Willie what he thought about the paper drive, but summer was the guide's busy season, and he'd been out of town on

trail rides for most of the last month.

The volunteers were fervently enthusiastic. "It's just like the war," said Judge Pennifold, posing for Peter's camera with a bundle of Saturday Evening Post. "Everybody pulling together!"

Peter noticed that many donors had taken the opportunity to clean out their basements, and Jasper Journals and other newspapers were being sorted from the magazines and tossed into a separate pile, seven feet high and still growing.

"At least it's not a health hazard this time," Delta said, after he had filled her in on the paper drive. He had discovered a sure fire way of getting a chance to talk to her. He called the clinic and booked the last appointment of the day with her.

"How did you get away with that?" she asked him when he admitted what he had done.

He grinned. "I took your advice and told the best truth I could. I told the receptionist I had to see you about a heart condition."

It took less than a week for every available magazine in Jasper to be collected and shipped up to the work site. In gratitude, Stan held a giant cook-out at the rodeo grounds. Peter was invited and helped himself to hot dogs and toasted marshmallows among the hordes of uniformed Cubs, and Scouts, and Lions in their red vests, and all the

other service clubs. After everyone was finished eating and the late summer sun had set, the evening's high point came. Two men soaked the pile of old newspapers with gasoline and set it alight to cheers from the crowd. The fire burned fiercely with yellow flames leaping twenty feet into the sky, so intense the crowd had to retreat from it. Soon, though, the paper was consumed and everyone said goodnight before going home in the dark. Peter stood watching the ashes for a long time. His free hot dog sat like a lump of lead in his stomach, and he wished he had stayed home.

Next morning, Peter was preparing for another trip to the construction site when Bill Tollstrup announced that he would cover this phase of the project.

"But that's my job," Peter said. "Why do you want to do it?"

"Give you a break," Bill replied breezily, loading a plate into the camera. "Besides, Stan asked me to."

The reporter was confused. "Why?"

"No offence, Peter, but he thinks you're a jinx. You show up, boom! Things go wrong. Said it worried the men, so he wanted to know if I'd do it, instead. And, besides . . . , " Bill closed the camera. He took a deep breath, and Peter was startled to notice that the publisher was blushing as he spoke.

"Besides, he said you don't believe in the project. He doesn't want you to go out to the site again. I told him

I'd take care of it."

"You said what?" Peter demanded.

"I said you're not going out there. That's all. I've made a decision and I'm sticking to it. Don't ask me any more questions about it, okay?"

The publisher raised his eyes from the camera to meet Peter's. "Please?" he asked.

There were some times, Peter knew, that you couldn't argue.

"All right," he nodded.

Bill straightened up and smiled, becoming his brisk self again. "Right, I'm off. See you later."

When he had gone, Peter sat at his desk and shook his head. What, he asked himself, had gotten into Stan?

Work with the magazines took less than a week to complete. Then, Jasper waited tensely for word from the lake.

Rumors whined like mosquitos: the magazines were holding perfectly, Stan was flying in origami experts from Japan to help, they had had to send to Edmonton for more magazines, the beautification committee was planning to sabotage the project, the project had failed, and the crew had vanished in the night. People stopped each other on street corners or whispered in line at the post office or hunched over their coffee cups at the Sunrise, "all talking about the same dam thing," as Romeo observed to Peter.

It was a terrible time for the reporter. Everyone expected news about the dam. "And they want me to deliver it," he complained to Delta. The clinic's receptionist had cottoned on to his scheme of appointment/dates, and he had had to resort to loitering outside the building until Delta came out and he could walk her home. The day had been a scorcher and they ducked into the Sunrise for a cold lemon Coke to find the place crowded with people who couldn't bring themselves to go home without one last chance to talk about the dam.

"So, do you have any news?" she asked.

"I just told you that I don't," Peter said in exasperation. Then he saw the corners of her mouth twitch. "Oh, ha ha."

Delta grinned. "You're so easy to tease. Besides, I can tell you the magazine business won't work."

"How do you know that?" Peter asked.

"Because I'm on the beautification committee, and we all got together last night and prayed for it to fail."

"Oh, that'll do it, all right," said the reporter.

"Besides," said Delta, "I can't believe even Stan can build a working dam out of papier mache."

The end came in near silence. When Peter went for lunch that Thursday, no one was talking on the street, and the Sunrise was empty. The air felt heavy and still. He wasn't surprised when Bill returned from an afternoon trip

to the dam with word that the water levels were dropping.

"Stan says he's finished," he reported. "No more. Kaput."

"That's it, then?" Peter said. He'd been expecting something more dramatic.

"Yeah," Bill said. He glanced at the wall clock, which showed a quarter to three. "Listen, it's a little early but I need a drink. Join me?"

Peter nodded and the publisher got out the good Scotch he normally reserved for clients. He poured generous measures into two glasses, passed one to Peter, and raised his own.

"To Medicine Lake," he said. "To Medicine Lake," Peter echoed.

Bill drained his glass, then stood shaking his head.

"Damn," he said. "Damn!"

Chapter 18

Next morning, a small convoy of six-by-six trucks rolled up noisily to the front of the newspaper office. Elsie called Peter to the front just in time for him to see Stan's entire work crew pile out. They milled around, stretching, joking, and lighting cigarettes. The reporter grabbed his notebook and went outside.

"Good morning," said Peter politely to the blue-chinned foreman whose name, improbably, had turned out to be Alistair Lovelace. "What's going on?"

"Closed down," said Lovelace, hauling out a pack of camels. "Paper didn't hold for shit. We've packed it in."

Peter nodded. "I heard yesterday. You're leaving?"

"Looks like it," said the foreman, lighting up and taking a deep drag. "This afternoon if the train's on time. C'mon, boys," he called to the crew. "Lunch at the AthaBee. It's on Mr. Mickliewiecz."

His announcement was greeted with cheers. Lovelace grinned at Peter as the crew went around the corner to the hotel. "Guess I'll wait till later to tell Mr. Mickliewiecz about his little present to us."

"Didn't you check with him first?" Peter hadn't expected such audacity.

"Hell, no. I don't need his permission!" snorted the foreman. "'Sides, if he wants these boys to show up sober

enough to load this gear, I've got to have them where I can keep my eye on them. Either he pays for their lunch at the AthaBee, or they'll be in every bar in town for the next hour. MY momma didn't raise no fools."

Later that afternoon, Willie called, the first time that Peter had ever heard him on the telephone.

"Peter Slater?" The voice had a fluid rasp to it.

"That's me," said Peter, tucking the phone into his shoulder and continuing to tap away at a piece about the upcoming Dominion Day celebrations in town. "Noon," he wrote, "official greetings from her Majesty, read by the mayor."

"It's Willie Manybears, Peter. You free this afternoon?"

For once, the reporter had nothing scheduled.

"I just have to finish this story," he said, recording the fact that there would be a march past of the local Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. "What's up?"

"There's something you ought to see. Down by Fifth Bridge on the Maligne."

Peter pressed him for more information, but Willie refused to come clean. "You've got to see it for yourself," was all he'd say.

The reporter supposed it would get him out of the office. "Yeah, why not?" he said. "Two o'clock, okay?" That would give him half an hour to wrap up his work.

Willie said he would drive, and Peter hung up, his curiosity aroused. He felt a rush of excitement. Secrets and native guides - some days this job was better than a book.

Then again - he sighed and went on typing the celebration schedule. "One p.m. Official Dominion Day ice cream cone eating contest. Lancaster Park. Five different age groups and special prizes for adult winners. Pick your own flavor! Sponsored by Bea's Dairy."

"Orgy to follow," he muttered.

Peter was out on the curb by five to the hour, waiting with notebook and loaded camera when Willie parked his battered pickup. Heaving himself onto the plaid blanket that served as a seat cover, Peter slammed the door with a tremendous metallic crash, and they were off with a jerk of gears. He ducked as Willie made a U-turn from the curb, only inches in front of an oncoming tour bus.

"Sorry," said Willie, waving casually at the gesturing bus driver. "These things make me a little nervous," he explained as he ground his way into second gear. Peter unclamped his hands from the dashboard.

"At least I don't have to sit on Annabelle this time," he said as lightly as he could.

"Yeah, this should be relaxing for a city boy like you," Willie looked over at him and grinned while the pickup wandered over the centre line. Willie glanced up to

see a semi-trailer bearing down on them and cranked the wheel so hard to the right that Peter could have sworn the left side tires came off the ground.

"You'd think these guys would look where they're going," said Willie in hurt tones, leaning out the window to peer after the big truck. "Geez, some people, huh?" He turned to his passenger for sympathy, but Peter was too busy wedging himself firmly in a corner and wishing Willie had let someone else drive. Like him. Or even Annabelle.

When Willie went through the stop sign at the edge of town without even slowing down, Peter closed his eyes firmly and only opened them again when the truck finally jounced to a halt. Willie had pulled onto the gravel parking lot just beside Fifth Bridge. Here, the Maligne River slowed its mad rush down the valley, spreading out into slower, broader, reaches. The green water swirled in eddies all along the river bank, forming a backwater along the river's edge closest to the truck. Willie clambered out and went over to peer at the water, and Peter followed him, after checking to see if all the protruding surfaces of the truck had survived the journey.

"There," said Willie, pointing down.

A sodden mass of paper circled lazily on the surface of the pool. Peter sat on a rock in the sunshine and looked at his guide in disgust.

"For this I risked my life," he said. "Did you drag me

all the way out here to show me THIS?" He gestured at the floating garbage.

"Yep," said Willie calmly. Peter sighed. Some people simply did not understand the priorities of the newspaper business - but why did HE always have to tell them? He explained that while dumping trash in the river was not very nice, it wasn't much of a news story, either.

Willie opened his mouth, but Peter quickly held up a restraining hand. "I know what you're going to say, but it's all right. It is news of a sort, and I'll take a picture of it. Then you can tell me how shocked and appalled you are by people's carelessness, and we'll make a nice story out of it."

The slow grin forming on Willie's round face encouraged him. Modestly, he told himself that the sign of a real reporter was one who could make news out of any old thing. He grinned back, and Willie patted him on the shoulder.

"I knew I could count on you," the guide said.

Peter was delighted by this vote of confidence. "Damn right!" he agreed. "I'll just grab a couple of quick pictures before we head back - unless you'd rather do the interview here?"

While he spoke Willie squatted at the water's edge and picked up a twig.

"There's one thing you should know, Pete," he said,

carefully separating one floating sheet of paper from the rest. The reporter was only half listening.

"That's great!" he said, peering through the square viewfinder of the camera. "Hold that pose." The composition was excellent: water, paper, pine tree, Willie. He snapped away. An idea struck him, and he scrambled over the rocks to where the guide crouched.

"Now pull that thing out of the water and hold it up by your face," Peter commanded. "It'll make a great close up!" He kept one eye closed against the distractions of the scenery, concentrating on the image in the lens.

"Did you know that Medicine Lake drains into Maligne Canyon?" Willie asked.

"Sure, sure," said Peter impatiently, head bowed over the Speedgrafx. "What's that got to do with dumping garbage here?"

"This is the Maligne River," Willie pointed out. Peter lowered the camera to see, with some annoyance, that the guide was still idly playing with the paper in the water. He continued, "The Maligne River flows out of Maligne Canyon. Which means that this water was in Medicine Lake yesterday. Or maybe the day before."

"Fine, fine," Peter said. "So the water goes down through the cracks in Medicine Lake and ends up down here. That's nice." Great, he thought. Just what I needed. A geology lesson from an Indian.

Willie shook his head.

"You still don't get it, do you? This, Mr. Reporter, is part of Stan's project. This is his garbage." Gently, he picked up the sheet from the water and showed it to Peter.

It was the October 17, 1937 front cover of Life magazine - a black and white picture of Hoover Dam. A sudden eddy in the current brought over another paper: an editorial page from Time.

"That's your story," said Willie, replacing the cover page in the river and straightening up as it floated gently towards the Athabasca.

It took a moment to sink in.

"Then all of this crap down here is from . . . ?" and Peter pointed towards the mountains. The guide nodded.

"Well," said Peter slowly, "then it is news. I guess this is bigger than I thought."

"Guess so," said Willie, and flipped his twig into the water.

The next morning, Bill finished reading the story on the magazines and laid the copy on his desk.

"This is pretty damning stuff," he began.

"Good pun," said Peter.

"Knock it off," the publisher said curtly. He hesitated. "Are you sure about this?"

"Damn sure." Seeing the blood rush into Bill's face, Peter held up a placating hand. "Sorry. It just slipped

out." He went on, "As sure as I can be. I stood there for almost an hour, watching the paper go by, mostly little bits and pieces but some whole pages, too."

His boss looked unhappy.

"I don't know, Pete. It isn't much to pin a story on," Bill said.

"All the story says is that the material is similar to what they were using at Medicine Lake," the reporter argued. "Bill, that river flows underground for ten miles and only comes out in Maligne Canyon. Where else could the stuff come from?" He told his publisher how Willie had gone up to the head of the canyon and dropped in a couple of magazines while Peter waited at Fifth Bridge. He pulled two wads of paper from a bag at his feet. "See? Most of the pages are still together. They didn't get torn to pieces like the other pages we found. Bill, what else could it be?"

His boss still wasn't satisfied.

"Are you sure enough of this to put your job on the line?" he asked.

"Yes," said Peter immediately, surprising himself. He knew Bill was looking for reassurance. And, he told himself, if he was wrong about this story, he didn't deserve to be a reporter.

"All right," Bill said, handing the copy back. "Run it as is."

"No changes?"

"You could spell it J-A-S-P-E-R instead of Japser in your lead, but other than that it's fine."

Peter checked. "Japser." He fought off a momentary doubt.

"Right. I'll send it out back." He stopped at the door. "Thanks, Bill."

"Yeah. What's a publisher for? Besides if you're wrong, I'll just blame you."

Peter smiled. "What's an editor for?"

Chapter 19

When the paper came out on Wednesday afternoon, he was prepared for a visit from Stan.

"He won't be pleased," Bill had warned him.

"I don't really expect him to be," Peter had said. He decided he sounded just like Humphrey Bogart, which reminded him that The African Queen was coming to town. He'd have to ask Delta if she wanted to see it.

But the engineer didn't show up at all. Peter started to worry about him. A quick telephone call to Romeo turned up the information that Stan was staying at the Athabasca. The reporter called to check.

"He's not taking any calls," the clerk told him. "He won't even let the chamber maid in. Wants his meals left on a tray outside his door."

On Thursday, a growing sense of foreboding sent Peter over to the hotel to pound on the engineer's door but no one answered.

"He can stay up there as long as he wants," Leo the manager told Peter when the reporter went back down to the lobby. "He paid cash in advance, and he's changing his own linen. Hell, he's a perfect guest."

Increasingly concerned, Peter contacted Sergeant Jack McGillivray for his official advice.

"Not a thing we can do," the policeman said. "He's

entitled to stay in his room and hibernate if he's paid for it."

When Stan walked into the Jasper Journal offices Friday morning, looking more gaunt and birdlike than ever, Peter was almost relieved to see him. The reporter was enjoying his second cup of coffee when Elsie Fulcher came back to his desk with fear on her face.

"H-h-he's here," she had said, her voice shaking. "I think He's been drinking."

Peter didn't have to ask who rated the capital "H." He put down his cup on the exact centre of the copy he was editing.

"Send him in, Elsie." Time for the showdown, Peter thought. It should have happened at high noon. He pushed back his chair and stood up.

Stan came in, his face calm. In one hand he held a copy of Wednesday's paper, slashed and scribbled with red ink. A potato sack swung from his other hand, weighted down with objects which bulged lumps in its rough surface. Stan set it gently on the floor.

"Mr. Slater," he began, "so good of you to see me on such short notice." His breath stank of booze and the reporter steeled himself not to flinch.

Mr. Slater? The formality caught Peter off guard. He had been expecting something more along the lines of "you dirty sonofabitch." But if Stan wanted to play

Alphonse-and-Gaston, that was fine with him.

"Mr. Mickliewiecz," he returned. He marvelled at how calm he felt. "Would you care to sit down?"

"No, thank you. I'll stand. This won't take long."

Ah, what the hell, Peter decided, suddenly reckless. "You don't mind if I sit?" he asked politely.

"No, certainly not. It's your office."

"Thank you." Peter sat. Emily Post would be proud of them, he decided.

"Actually, Mr. Slater," Stan continued, "you might want to get out your notebook. I have something to announce that might be of interest to your readers - and possibly to you, personally."

It made Peter feel better to have the shield of a notebook and pen in front of him.

"What is your announcement, Mr. Mickliewiecz?" he requested politely. He noticed that the hairs on his arms were standing on end.

"First of all," Stan said, "I'd like to acknowledge the validity of your criticisms." He set the red-marked newspaper on Peter's desk.

"They weren't intended to be criticisms, Mr. Mickliewiecz," Peter interrupted. "They were mostly things I saw with my own eyes."

Stan smiled. "Well, anyway, they weren't favorable to my project. No matter, no matter," he said, waving off any

protest. "What you wrote has some small basis in fact."

Stan's shoulders slumped slightly, and he appeared to relax. Peter realized that the engineer had been standing at attention.

"Your summary of my efforts at Medicine Lake was more-or-less accurate. No third time lucky for me," he chuckled. Peter didn't see the humor.

"You've made me realize," Stan went on, "the sheer folly of my ideas. All along I've been working against Mother Nature: attempts were doomed to failure. What I realize now is that I should have worked with nature."

"That's quite a change of heart," Peter said, scribbling rapidly.

"Call it a revelation if you will," Stan said. "It came to me late at night, watching the water drain out of the bathtub. Why should people have to take a ferry when they could easily drive across the lake in their own cars?"

"So you're going to build a bridge?" Peter asked.

"No, a bridge six miles long would be much too expensive. But six miles of road" The engineer let the sentence trail off.

Peter had the distinct impression that he'd missed something vital. He couldn't figure out where bathtubs fit in.

"A road around the lake?"

"Oh, no," said Stan. "That would be much too

expensive. It's too far to go around. Straight across is best."

It was too much for Peter.

"But if there's no bridge and no road, won't the cars get wet?"

Stan threw back his head and laughed.

"Not if there's no water!" he shouted triumphantly.

Peter backed as far away from the engineer as the wall would let him and began checking for escape routes.

"No water? Of course," he stammered, "what a brilliant idea."

The engineer's mood changed in a flash.

"Don't humor me, Mr. Slater. I am not a madman, and this is a vital mission," Stan said in a voice of ominous lunacy, leaning menacingly over the desk.

"No, no, certainly not," Peter said soothingly and very, very, quickly. "I just didn't understand, that's all. You know how bad I am with technical details."

"That's true," Stan said thoughtfully, calm again. "You are a technical idiot, aren't you?"

"Exactly," Peter said through lightly clenched teeth.

"A real scientific moron, in fact," the engineer suggested, now all affability.

"That's me," agreed Peter. "Ha, ha," he added.

"Indeed," said Stan pleasantly. "An ignoramous of engineering."

Peter didn't like the way the conversation was headed and decided to change the subject.

"Would you like to tell me the details of the plan?" he asked, adding, "If you're sure I can understand it."

The engineer thought. "It's possible, I suppose." With a growing enthusiasm that did nothing for Peter's nerves, Stan explained that since the lake drained from the bottom, he was going to let gravity work for him. "To put it in terms you can understand," he concluded, "I'm going to pull the plug on Medicine Lake."

"So all the water will run out?" Peter asked, fascinated in spite of himself.

"Exactly," said Stan approvingly. "You get a gold star." He took one out of his jacket pocket, licked it, and stuck it carefully on the corner of the desk.

Peter heard the fear in his own voice when he asked his next question. "So, Stan, just how are you going to drain the lake?"

"Oh, that's easy," the engineer replied, stooping birdlike to open the potato sack. He pulled out five, long, dull-red cylinders. "Dynamite."

Peter froze. A detached part of him wondered how he was going to write up this story - if he survived.

Stan stroked the red sticks. "Isn't it funny," he said, "here I've been blocking up the cracks, when all I had to do was make them bigger. I didn't even need the work

crew. Could have done the whole thing myself!" He giggled. It was an alarming sound. "Oh, well, live and learn."

He waved the explosives for emphasis. Peter grasped at a straw.

"Is that real dynamite, Stan?" he asked in a very small voice.

"Of course it's real dynamite," the engineer said patiently. "Fake dynamite wouldn't explode."

All Peter could think of was the need to stall. His mind worked desperately to come up with a question.

"Er, won't you have trouble lighting it underwater?" As soon as he asked, he wished he hadn't. Explosives were the last thing he wanted Stan to think about.

"An excellent question," the engineer replied. "Well done. Spending time with me has obviously improved your practical approach to problems." He reached into the sack again to produce a silver vial. "Blasting caps work superbly underwater. Fulminate of mercury."

He peered intently at the device. "Only problem is that they're a little unstable. You have to handle them with care or POW!"

Peter almost jumped out of his chair.

"Pow?" he asked weakly.

"Exactly," Stan beamed at him. "Drop one and bam! Up she goes. Not enough power to take out a wall, for example, but enough to blow your fingers off. Here, catch!"

Peter yelped and jerked up his hands.

"Fooled you!" Stan laughed gaily, showing the reporter the cap still in his hand. "You look pale. You really must learn to relax, Mr. Slater." Still chuckling, he dropped the dynamite into the potato sack, carefully replaced the blasting cap, and turned to go.

Clutching at his chest, Peter managed to ask in a voice barely audible over the pounding of his heart, "Where . . . where are you going with those?"

"Medicine Lake, of course. No time like the present," Stan said briskly.

"You might get hurt!" It was the best Peter could come up with.

"I am a soldier in the army of progress," Stan declared, snapping to attention. Then he slung the sack over his shoulder with a nonchalance that made Peter blanch and strode from the room.

With shaking hands, the reporter reached for his telephone. His finger kept slipping as he tried to dial and it seemed like a very long time before he was able to make his hand do what he wanted. He wished it would stop trembling.

Chapter 20

"Good morning, Jasper RCMP. Sergeant McGillivray speaking. How may I be of assistance?" Briefly, Peter wondered when the Mounties found time to teach their men exquisite telephone manners.

"Jack, it's Peter Slater," he said in a shaky voice. "Stan Mickliewiecz was just in here to tell me he's going to drain Medicine Lake." Peter knew he had left out something important, but he couldn't think what it was.

"Well, it's a change from filling it up. What do you want me to do about it?"

Peter could not believe a senior NCO could be so dense.

"But he's drunk, and he's on his way up there right now!" What had he forgotten?

"Is he driving?" McGillivray's interest was piqued.

"Yes. Right now." And when Stan got there he was going to, going to Peter's mind went blank.

McGillivray didn't wait. "Okay, as soon as one of the boys gets back from coffee, I'll send him up."

"You don't understand," Peter said desperately. He knew he'd left out a key word. Damn, he thought, then inspiration hit him. The missing word started with "d". Dam? No. Drain? No, but that was closer. "He's on his way up to Medicine Lake," he explained to the sergeant, buying

time for his uncooperative memory. Drat? No, that wasn't it. "He's drunk." Drunk? No, he'd just used that one.

"Is he dangerous?" McGillivray inquired cautiously. Peter considered the idea of Stan being dangerous, and decided he wasn't unless he counted the . . . Oh, my God, he realized.

"Dynamite!" he blurted. "He's got dynamite and blasting caps, and he's on some kind of mission to blow a hole in the bottom of Medicine Lake and drain all the water out and build a road across it!"

McGillivray took the news with infuriating calmness.

"A drunk with dynamite and blasting caps, loose in a national park with intent to blow up a lake, huh?" The sergeant didn't even raise his voice. "I guess I'd better go out there." Then he hesitated. "Do you want to come with me?"

No! thought Peter. "Yes," he said.

"You understand the Force won't be liable if you suffer any injuries?"

"Of course," said Peter, in complete control of himself again. "It's all right. I'm a professional, too." He wondered how he could sound so cool when he knew he was going to die.

Five minutes later, Peter was climbing into the front seat of McGillivray's patrol car with a question.

"Why are you taking me along?" he asked. The coward in

him was praying for the sergeant to change his mind and kick him out of the vehicle. Instead, McGillivray rubbed the bump on his nose and shrugged. Sunlight glinted off the reassuring sharpshooter emblems on the sleeve of his uniform jacket.

"I don't know," McGillivray said. "Just a feeling I'll need an independent witness."

Peter had a brain wave. If one witness was good, two might be better.

"Then you should swing by the clinic and pick up Dr. Mackenzie," he said casually.

"Her? What for?" McGillivray was startled.

Peter feigned surprise and crossed his fingers. "Didn't you know? She spent two years working in a mental hospital in Britain with all their most violent cases. You wouldn't believe the number of techniques she's got for calming down the crazies." At least the last part wasn't a complete lie, since he knew Delta didn't know any such techniques. "I thought she'd be our best bet for talking Stan down before he gets hurt."

To his relief, McGillivray nodded agreement. "Yeah, that's a good idea."

Another thought struck Peter. He persuaded the sergeant to let him go into the clinic alone, "so Delta's patients won't worry."

There was one more question Peter had to ask.

"Will you get in trouble for taking two civilians with you?"

"Sure," said McGillivray, "if it doesn't work. And if anybody finds out." He gave Peter a meaningful look.

"Oh," said Peter, realizing what the sergeant was getting at. "No story, huh?"

"Not unless you want us both in trouble," McGillivray agreed.

Peter strode up to the reception desk and leaned across to murmur, "I need to see Dr. Mackenzie immediately. It's an emergency."

"Do you have an appointment?" The receptionist clearly didn't approve of emergencies. "Couldn't it wait until tomorrow?"

Peter bent even closer and whispered, "Not according to Sergeant McGillivray." He stared directly into her right eye.

"Oh," she said. Then, "Oooh! I'll be right back."

Julius Steele stuck his head around the corner of the archway leading to the examining rooms.

"You again?" said the doctor. "Does this mean I have to take her patients?"

"Probably," Peter said. At least if he got lucky, it did.

Steele shrugged, made a face, and disappeared back into the depths of the clinic.

The receptionist returned. "Dr. Mackenzie will see you now."

Ignoring the expressions of outrage on the waiting faces around him, Peter dove into Delta's office and closed the door.

"What is it this time?" Delta began, but he cut her off.

"You've got to come with me. Stan's drunk, and he's gone out with a sack of dynamite to blow a hole in the bottom of Medicine Lake. Jack McGillivray is outside waiting for us, and he thinks you're an expert in settling down crazies because you used to work in a mental hospital. Are you coming or not?"

Delta's mouth opened and shut several times.

"Why me?"

"Who else would I go to?" Peter asked.

He wasn't at all surprised when she nodded. "I'll grab my bag."

Quickly, they went out to the police car and piled in. The front seat was fairly large, but with three people in it Peter found he still had to press tightly against Delta to get the door closed. Under other circumstances he might have enjoyed it.

"Right," said McGillivray. "Cavalry time." He pulled away from the curb and flipped on the lights and siren.

They roared through town and across the bridge over

the Athabasca River as just one thought ran through Peter's mind. What the hell have I got us into this time?

Chapter 21

Whatever it was, it was certainly noisy.

As McGillivray's police car topped the last rise before Medicine Lake, an explosion shattered the peace of the mountain morning. A great fountain of dirty water leaped on high and hung in the air before it plunged down again.

"Jesus," Peter said in awe.

The sergeant pulled the car over to the gravel shoulder. "HOW much dynamite did you say Stan had?" he asked, watching spray and smoke drift across the roiled waters of the lake.

"I thought it was just a few sticks," Peter confessed.

"Shit," said McGillivray, then drove the last hundred yards into the now-deserted work site. They climbed slowly out of the car and into the warm mountain air.

"Right," said the sergeant, taking charge. "We'll move along the lake shore until we get within shouting distance of him. Then you can try to talk him around, Dr. Mackenzie. I'll go first, in case there's any trouble."

Much as Peter appreciated the offer, he felt there was something missing.

"Shouldn't you, um, take out your gun?" he asked.

McGillivray looked shocked. "Do you have any idea how much paperwork I'd have to do?"

It wasn't all that difficult to find Stan. Once they got clear of the windrow of dead bush at the far side of the site, they could see him, perhaps eight hundred yards away, marching along the shore, shoulders back, head held high, barely breaking step for boulders and the loose rocks that skittered out from under his feet. The potato sack dangled jauntily over his left shoulder.

Even as they watched, he set the sack down on a rock and took something out.

"Oh, oh," said McGillivray inadequately. Of one accord, the trio stopped. Stan sat in apparent comfort on his rock, a bundle of red dynamite resting on his lap while he worked on one end of it. Then he stood up clutching the charge and, arms swinging in fine military style, walked out into the lake until the water reached his hips. Then he bent over, submerging himself. When he surfaced and returned to the shore, the dynamite was nowhere to be seen. Stan went back to his rock, picked up an object too small to be identified, and twisted his hands over it until BAM!

Another gout of muddy water leaped skyward, until gravity recaptured it. By then, Stan was already marching down the shore. An eddy of wind brought a whiff of sulfur and damp to the watchers - along with something else.

Delta cocked her head. "Listen," she said.

"What . . . ?" Peter began, but she shushed him. He exchanged a glance with McGillivray. Then they both heard

it.

"He's singing," McGillivray said.

"'Tipperary,'" Delta confirmed.

It occurred to Peter that the engineer had declared war on Medicine Lake. He headed off after Stan again, and the other two followed him, scrambling along the rocky shoreline but gaining little ground on their quarry.

"This isn't working," Peter said, panting. "Why don't we just yell at him?"

McGillivray shrugged. "Sure. On three?" The others nodded. "Okay, all together. One, two, three, Mickiewicz!" he shouted.

"Stan!" called Peter and Delta.

Peter wondered what that had sounded like.

The engineer was far enough away that he did not react immediately to their cries. Then he turned, snapped to attention, saluted, then waved merrily and resumed his march along the shoreline.

His pursuers had little choice but to keep going. Traces of another song drifted back to them. "'Pretoria'," Peter thought.

Stan wasn't moving quickly, but Delta, Peter, and McGillivray could not make good time behind him. Delta's skirt and high heels forced her to go slowly among the jumbled rocks which lined the lake shore.

"Next time you take me out chasing lunatics," she

said, wriggling over a boulder, "I'm going to insist you let me go home and change first."

"NEXT time," Peter replied, "I will." They both started to giggle.

McGillivray raised his eyes to heaven. "Civilians," he muttered.

After a few minutes, Peter was ready to give up. "This is no good," he panted. Between Delta's work clothes and Stan's blithe military directness, the trio of hunters was dropping even further behind their intended prey. "We'll never catch him."

"Yes, we will," said McGillivray grimly, mopping the sweat from his forehead. It occurred to Peter that forty-year old RCMP sergeants don't often have to pursue their quarry over stony fields. McGillivray was showing distinct signs of wear. "He came out here to use that dynamite, and when he does it again, we'll catch up to him. Let's go."

"If he's using the dynamite, I'm not sure I want to catch up with him," Peter protested, suddenly feeling mortal.

"Oh, no, you don't, pal." Delta grabbed his arm. "You dragged us both out here to get this character, and get him we will - and you're coming with us!"

"If I wasn't a gentleman --," Peter began haughtily.

"Ha!" was Delta's withering reply, as she hiked her

skirt up and moved gingerly after the sergeant. Peter had little choice but to follow, concentrating on the rocks in front of him until McGillivray caught his arm.

"He's stopped," the sergeant said.

Beside the rock Willie had called the Indian's Head, Stan stood casually skimming stones across the lake. An irrelevant thought crossed Peter's mind: that's crazy. The water's way too rough to make them skip.

"Over here," Delta called, cutting into his reverie. "I've found a path." She pointed. Along the very edge of the lake there was a narrow way free of rocks which Peter hadn't noticed. The doctor sat down on a boulder.

"Wore you out, did we?" asked McGillivray, leaning on the rock and breathing hard. "Want us to give you a minute to rest?"

"No," Delta said. "I'm fine. Just needed to get rid of these --" and she pulled off her pumps "-- so I could walk better."

By then, Stan had begun to climb the Indian's Head, going right up the rockface. He made it easily to the top, and stood waiting for them, casually swinging the potato sack. He didn't speak until they had reached the base of the rock.

"Peter," he said by way of greeting, "I'm disappointed in you. Didn't you bring your camera?"

"Camera?" Peter said stupidly.

"Of course!" Stan sounded surprised. "When I saw you coming, I thought you wanted to record these moments for posterity."

Baffled, Peter said nothing. Stan gave an exasperated sigh.

"YOU know." Gesturing with his free hand, he created headlines in the air, as if reading from a huge imaginary newspaper. "'Mickliewiecz Conquers Medicine Lake,' 'Science Triumphs!'" He checked to see if the reporter was following his line of thought. "That sort of thing."

"Play along with him," Delta muttered. "Stall."

"Huh? Oh, yeah." Peter's brain seemd stuck in molasses. "Hey, you're right, Stan. I should have brought my camera. How about waiting until I can go back to town and get it?"

"What a great idea!" Stan beamed down at him benevolently. Peter exchanged a triumphant look with Delta.

But the engineer wasn't finished. "It's a really good idea. Too bad it's impossible. I'd like to oblige you, but I'm in a hurry." He added in a stage whisper, "Orders, you know!"

Sergeant McGillivray decided to take the direct route.

"Okay, Mickliewiecz," he said. "Fun's over. You're under arrest, so why don't you just climb down from there?"

"Sergeant," said Stan calmly, "need I remind you that I outrank you? And --," he held up a hand to stop

McGillivray's protest, "that as an officer, I can only be arrested by someone of equal or greater rank? We won't, for the moment, discuss insubordination. I believe every enlisted man is entitled to one mistake." He smiled brightly to show how tolerant he could be.

The policeman failed to appreciate his forbearance.

"I warn you, sir, that anything you say may be taken down and used against you in a court of law."

Stan pursed his lips thoughtfully and gave McGillivray the raspberry. Peter caught the sergeant's hand as he moved it towards his holster. "Reason with him," he murmured. The police officer made a visible effort to restrain himself. "Okay," he said, heavily. "I'll try."

"Now, Stan," he began rationally, "you can't stay up there all day --"

"Can too," the engineer interrupted, but McGillivray plowed ahead.

"So why not come down? We'll take you back to Jasper, and you can have a nice ride in a police car."

"Why don't you get stuffed, you mounted moron," Stan replied levelly. It was more than the sergeant could take.

"I order you in the Queen's name!" he thundered.

"Up yours," replied Stan. "And hers," he added after a moment's consideration.

"Oh, my God," said Delta in disgust. She and Peter had propped themselves on a flat rock to watch the

confrontation. Now she rose and went over to the police officer.

"Perhaps I can help," she began politely.

"Perhaps you could just stay out of this and let the police take care of it," McGillivray replied brusquely. Delta walked around to face him squarely, put her hands on her hips, and let fly.

"Listen, sergeant, you're the one who dragged me away from my practice under the pretence of using my expertise" -- Peter crossed his fingers behind his back -- "so why don't you let me use it?"

"Yes, why don't you?" Stan was lying prone, watching the confrontation with his chin propped in both hands.

"You stay out of this!" McGillivray shouted.

"No," Delta interjected firmly. "YOU stay out of this. Go over there and sit down." That woman, thought Peter, has natural authority. He guessed that McGillivray recognized the tone of command when he heard it because he turned abruptly on his heel and headed for the spot beside Peter.

By the time Delta turned to speak to Stan, the engineer was standing.

"We were worried about you," she began.

Stan seemed touched by her concern. "Were you really? That's awfully sweet of you, my dear, but I assure you I'm in no danger. This stuff," he tapped his sack with his foot, bringing both the other men off their rock, "is quite

safe in the hands of an expert. And I AM an expert."

"But aren't you a little tired?" Delta persisted.

"Wouldn't you like to take a rest?"

"A rest? What for?" Stan asked in puzzlement.

"You've got lots of experience with working men," Delta's tone was respectful. "Don't you find they're more liable to make mistakes when they're tired? We were just worried that, well, something might happen."

"But what could possibly go wrong?" Stan bent and plunged a hand into the potato sack. Peter tensed, and McGillivray began very quietly to undo the flap of his holster. Delta stayed where she was as the engineer took out a single stick of explosive.

"Dynamite," said Stan thoughtfully, tossing the stick up and catching it, "is perfectly harmless without some kind of fuse." He smacked the explosive against the rock with a suddenness that made the others jump. "See? Nothing," the engineer said reassuringly. Somehow Peter could not manage to feel reassured.

"The problem only comes," Stan went on, pulling a silvery blasting cap from his bag, "when you add in one of these babies. The first lesson of blasting is never drop one. Never, ever, ever!" he said so emphatically that Peter began to relax again. "Especially not like this," he added casually, flicking the blasting cap back over his shoulder.

CRACK! Peter, Delta and McGillivray ducked

involuntarily when it exploded.

On top of his rock, Stan was laughing so hard he had to hold his sides. "You sh-sh-should s-s-s-ee your f-f-f-f-aces," he gasped.

Peter wished he had never thought of asking the doctor along. "Delta," he called, "get away from him!"

"Don't give me orders!" she snapped, coming over to wave a finger in his face. "unless I really want you to," she added in an undertone. "Thanks for the excuse."

"Ah, what'd you go away for?" Stan asked querulously. "I TOLD you, it's perfectly safe." He became calm. "I have everything under control. This job is being done under carefully controlled, scientifically-tested conditions, by an expert with years of experience in the field. How can I convince you to trust me?"

"Leave the bag and come down?" Peter suggested.

"No, that's no good." Stan pondered. "How about the ol' soft shoe, instead?" he said, brightening, and began to dance on top of the rock. He was really quite graceful, Peter thought in surprise, as the engineer executed a neat turn on one foot, potato sack swinging from his right hand. Even as they watched Stan's macabre dance, he, Delta, and the sergeant moved slowly around behind their boulder. Oblivious, Stan continued to whirl and shuffle.

"See? Nothing to worry about! Nothing at all," he called. "Safe as houses." He leaped to the far side of the

rock, stopping neatly at the edge before turning back and executing a graceful bow to his audience. Peter wondered whether they should simply leave him to get on with his mission, when Stan spoke again.

"Now, if you'll excuse me," he said turning away and speaking over his shoulder in courteous tones, "I have a job to do, a rigid schedule to keep, and many holes to blow before I sleep." Then he walked off the rock. Even as Peter grabbed Delta and dove for cover behind their rock, he saw Stan extend his long, gaunt arms and flap them once, quite slowly.

"Oops," Peter heard the engineer say, just before the explosion.

When the reporter picked himself up, he found the engineer's workboot standing empty and upright beside him.

"Everybody all right?" he asked in a shaky voice.

"Shouldn't I be asking you that?" Delta said from below him. Peter remembered pulling her underneath in the instant after Stan had fallen.

"Okay," he said, rationally. "Go ahead." Instead, she sat up and put her arms around him. He could tell from the angle of her head that she could see the boot. Doctors, he thought, must get used to sights like that.

Epilogue

The train which was to carry Stan's remains back to his relatives in Toronto arrived in Jasper in the dark, in the early hours of a misty morning. Two people waited on the station platform beside the coffin, which was covered in beads of moisture. Peering through the fog, Peter could barely make out the circle of light which marked the lamp at the corner of the depot. In spite of the time and the damp, he was glad he had let Delta talk him into coming out.

"Somebody should say goodbye to him," she had argued. "And if you don't come, I'm sure Julius will."

He had smiled. "Just for that I ought to let you go with him. What time do you want me to pick you up?"

That had been after the meeting at Romeo's. Now he was grateful that she had made the suggestion. He wanted to hug her in thanks, which wasn't too difficult to do, since she was already pressed comfortably against him. She squeezed him back, and he had decided he could get used to this, when a shadowy form appeared at the far end of the platform. Willie Manybears walked out of the mist and into the light from the station windows.

"Can't you kids use the back seat of a car like everybody else?" he greeted them.

"No cars in Jasper, remember?" Peter answered.

Willie grinned. "I'm never gonna forget that night."

Neither would Peter. "What are you doing here?"

The guide nodded at the coffin. The lights of the station glistened on its dew drops. "Thought Phil might need help loading that onto the train." He measured it with his hands. "He sure was a tall man. Skinny, mind you, but tall."

A train whistle wailed nearby, and now Peter could hear the roar of its engine. Phil came out of the station agent's office as the train came to a halt beside the platform. The windows of the passenger cars were all dark, and no one got off. Willie and Phil manouevered the coffin over to the baggage car, and Peter helped them push it up the ramp. Then he went back and stood with Delta, watching until the train pulled out of the station and vanished into the darkness in the east, the cry of its whistle echoing from the mountainsides.

"Poor Stan," he said. "He never did get off on the right foot, did he?"